

ADELAIDE DE NARBONNE,

WITH MEMOIRS OF
CHARLOTTE DE CORDET.

A TALE.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
HENRY OF NORTHUMBERLAND.

“ Nature will revolt, when perfecution wrings the heart ; and even
“ a parent’s rights lose their instinctive powers, when tyranny takes
“ place of reason and affection.”

MRS. ROBINSON’S WALSINGHAM.

.....

“ Regretter ce ceux qu’on aime, est un bien, en comparaison de
“ vivre avec ce qu’on hait.”

ROCHEFAUCAULT.

VOL. III.

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ADÉLAÏDE DE NARBONNE

WITH MEMOIRS OF

CHARLOTTE DE CORDÉ

A TALE

IN FORTUNES

BY THE AUTHOR OF
HENRY OF NORTHUMBRIA



PRINTED AT THE

1841

ADELAIDE

DE

NARBONNE.

CHAP. I.

—“ Alone, forsaken, faint,
“ Kneeling beneath his sword, falt’ring I took
“ An oath equivocal, that I ne’er wou’d wed
“ One of the name.”

HOMER

“ IT has frequently been observed that to argue where determined prejudice has taken root, and proves the principal mobile of action, or to attempt reasoning with an opponent previously resolved

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B

against

against conviction, may display much courageous ingenuity in the art of disputation, but surely excludes every idea of common sense from the conference. I had no inclination to exhibit my talents in this way, nor any desire to rear the banner of defiance in opposition to parental contradiction; and, therefore, endeavoured to bend my mind to the critical situation of those circumstances in which I now found myself placed. A moment's reflection convinced me that the very nature of the requested abjuration implied my father's ignorance of the real state of affairs, since, had the reprobated fact been fully ascertained, such a proposal would never have been tendered to me. This recollection braced every nerve with newborn fortitude; and, sensible I should never think of forming another engagement, I ventured to comply with the awful test of sincerity, thus tyrannically forced upon my acceptance, and yielded with a mixture of returning timidity and resolution, that alternately agitated my bosom, to take the asseveration prescribed to me, as an inevitable evil from which I knew it impossible to escape. A thousand horrors thrilled through every vein, as my faltering tongue pronounced the dreadful sentence after the unfeeling lips of a despotic father; dreadful, however, happily only in proportion to the

the

the meaning he himself assigned it, for on my side I viewed the tenor of it in a very different light, and secretly regarded every word I uttered as a record placed in Heaven to witness my intention of never entering into a second union. But whence, then, came the emotion that at times oppressed me almost to suffocation? Alas! I know not, unless it was mysteriously prophetic of a future inability to maintain the letter of the oath imposed upon me by a power that set resistance, on my part, at defiance.

‘It is well,’ said the Count de Narbonne, as I rose from my knees, ‘you may now retire; but, remember, your future conduct will prove the best illustration of your present sincerity; and never cease to remember also, that any connection whatever with those, even the most distantly related to a family I have so many reasons to detest, will be considered as the deepest culpable breach of duty you can possibly commit, and draw down upon your devoted head the eternal resentment of a justly incensed parent!’

“I shudder, my dear Charlotte, even at this period of time, as I repeat these horrible words; but I shuddered still more at the awful moment of their pronounciation: it seemed to my terrified imagination as if the curse meant for future trans-

gressions had recoiled upon the past, and impressed it with the effects of that very imprecation I had used so much art to evade, in the first instance, without success.

“ The sacrifice once completed, I was allowed to quit my father’s apartment, and hurried, in trembling agitation, to my own. That temporary degree of fortitude, which the exigency of the instant had brought forth into action, no longer supported my sinking spirits; I threw myself into a chair, which was reached with difficulty, and gave way to my tortured feelings in a flood of tears, whose timely indulgence probably saved me from a fainting fit.

“ Reflection now returned with all its variety of tortures; suspicion, I too well perceived, had been roused, and of course I might reasonably expect its attendant, *observation*, would hover henceforth over all my motions; every minute that passed away became of consequence, in proportion as it brought me nearer the chance of discovery; and discovery appeared inevitably approaching, as my altered form almost daily laid me more and more open to investigation.

“ My mind dwelt on a multiplicity of schemes and expedients, all of which in their turn seemed surrounded with so many insuperable obstacles, that

that each alternately yielded to successors equally objectionable; till no longer able to sustain the conflict of jarring passions, I determined at length, as a *dernier* resort, to wait upon my friend, the Lady Abbess, and by a full, honest, and sincere confession of past and present transactions, to interest her feelings in my favour, with the firm resolution of taking her advice for the future rule of my conduct.

“ This plan, once adopted, appeared too consolatory not to be soon put in execution, and it succeeded to my wish. That inestimable woman soothed my sorrows by every method most likely to have the effect of restoring some degree of tranquillity to my agitated mind; and forgetting the rigid monitress in the compassionate friend, overlooked the error I had committed by entering into a clandestine engagement, under the certain conviction at the time, that I was encroaching on the sacred verge of filial duty and discretion, and by so doing, laying myself open to the severest reprehension from those persons who had never deviated themselves from the narrow path of moral rectitude. Perhaps, however, I might not have escaped so easily, had not the acute distress, under the pressure of which she then saw me labouring, together with the impossibility of recalling the past, and a thorough knowledge of the domestic difficulties I had to

struggle with, powerfully pleaded my cause in a bosom replete with all the milder virtues of humanity.

“ In fact, my situation was now become truly critical; the harsh treatment received from my father, joined to my own apprehensions, and the natural consequences of both producing an uncommon degree of agitation, my frame became so cruelly discomposed, that a premature delivery, it was feared, would unavoidably take place. To guard against an event so serious and alarming in every point of view, the Abbess advised me to request my father’s permission for spending a few days at the Convent, which term might afterwards be lengthened to a longer period, as circumstances occurred to render pretences for that purpose necessary. Nothing particularly singular could be surmised from such an application to the Count de Narbonne. I have already more than once had occasion to mention that I frequently visited this old and respected friend of my mother’s, and sometimes even spent a week or two at a time with her. This plan was, therefore, judged less liable to suspicion or discovery than a temporary residence in the rock; as no person would presume to question the propriety of her actions, or venture to intrude themselves impertinently on the privacy of those visitors she chose to entertain: at any rate,

it was but retiring to the recess afterwards, if such incidents should happen as might render that step more plausibly secure for my safety.

“ This matter agreed upon, and the consequent arrangements set on foot, even before I left the Convent, comparative tranquillity once more began to resume its station, and my spirits of course became better enabled to encounter the sullen looks of my father on our next interview at table; where little conversation passed on either side, and still less inclination appeared for what unavoidably occurred during the short period of this gloomy and uncomfortable meal.

“ Fortunately, an incident soon took place of the utmost importance to my present situation.

“ About the time now mentioned, some secret transaction, of a political nature, with the Court of Vienna, required a negociator of unquestionable fidelity and superior talents for its execution; and my father was immediately fixed upon as one perfectly calculated for such an undertaking.

“ As he had long secluded himself from the world, and enjoyed at best but a precarious state of health, it was not supposed the notification of his Sovereign to his appointment would have been accepted; but the few who were better acquainted with his ambitious disposition, and the strong predilection

predilection entertained for every circumstance that could possibly flatter his pride, by placing him in a more pre-eminent point of view for the display of those extensive abilities of which he fully knew the value, doubted not that every other consideration would vanish before the more predominant ones which usually occupied his mind; and they were not mistaken in this opinion.

“ After starting a few difficulties, which were easily removed or obviated, and endeavouring to enhance the merit of obedience by an ostentatious harangue, tending to shew the violence done to his own inclination, by sacrificing the enjoyments of private life and domestic happiness to the more public duty every man owed his King and country, the Count de Narbonne at length condescended to please himself, and submitted to the will of his Majesty, which was too completely in unison with his own, not to be acquiesced in with great, though secret satisfaction. He set out on his embassy, and relieved me by his absence from a thousand well-founded apprehensions.

“ Nothing surely was ever more opportune, more happily timed than this most unexpected event. The period of return, it is true, was fixed at no great distance; a few weeks were supposed competent to finish the business he had undertaken:

undertaken: but the nature of political affairs is uncertain to a proverb, and therefore numberless incidents might occur to lengthen the term appropriated for the execution of his mission. At any rate, as it was not imagined I could possibly reach the end of my reckoning, the shortness of the Count's allotted residence in Germany gave me little concern:—if the apprehended circumstance took place, it would be finally over before his departure from Vienna; should the case prove otherwise, my dependance rested on the chapter of accidents for concealment and future safety. I was young, and the present relief had lightened my mind too much to think of burdening it immediately again with the probable evils of hereafter; to Providence, therefore, I committed that hereafter, and patiently waited for whatever it saw fit to order.

“ Prior to these events, my foster-sister had lately been married to a young man, whose place of abode was at some distance from Narbonne; she now happened to be in the same situation with myself, though farther advanced in her pregnancy, and her mother had promised to take care of her when the hour of confinement arrived. Margaretta, however, finding it impossible, on my account, to fulfil this engagement, or leave her

B 5

home

home at so critical a period, requested her daughter's presence at Narbonne, where she would not only be equally under a parent's eye, but likewise have every attendant expence, incident to her situation, fully defrayed at my cost. Such an offer as this was not to be refused; and her husband having accordingly escorted her to the cottage, returned on the following day to his own habitation.

“ The condition and arrival of this young woman suggested an idea that seemed preferable to any other scheme yet thought of for the disposal of my poor little infant when it made its appearance. It was briefly this:—Should my child first see the light, it was immediately to be conveyed hither (where two apartments were prepared in the rock for its reception), and carefully concealed till the delivery of my nurse's daughter took place; after which, having privately removed it to the cottage, it was to be produced at a convenient season as a twin brother or sister to the one she brought forth.

“ Alas! short-sighted, erring mortals that we are! How much did we congratulate ourselves on this ill-starred arrangement—how little imagined that we had then sealed the sentence of destruction
for

for my hapless, my ever-lamented cherub!—Oh God!—but thy will be done!”

She paused, raised her eyes to Heaven, struggled (it was a momentary struggle) for composure, and thus proceeded:—

“ The notion for some time entertained of my situation proved but too well-founded. I was one evening seized with the pains of premature labour; my nurse was hastily summoned, and her other daughter, who was then my own maid, united her efforts to get me conveyed to the Convent. The attempt, however, was ineffectual; I grew worse almost at every step, and at length, totally unable to proceed any farther, was forced to stop at the recess, where, after undergoing inconceivable torture for several hours, I was delivered of a little, helpless being, who, in spite of the disadvantages usually attendant on early births, appeared to be uncommonly strong and healthy.

“ The domestics at the Castle, some of whom I suspected had received directions to observe my motions, entertained no idea of my being any where else than at the Convent. I had occasionally taken care to publish my intention of spending the principal portion of my time there during the latter part of the Count's absence; and of course they naturally imagined I had now put that design

in execution. No enquiry was, therefore, set on foot, though, as a preparative against the chance of it, the Lady Abbess propagated a report that a sprain in one of my ankles obliged me to keep my chamber, to which I should be under the necessity of confining myself for several weeks to come. That kind and respectable friend seldom left my bed-side, unless when the duties attached to her superior station in the cloister, unavoidably deprived me of her company. To her care and unremitting tenderness I am probably indebted for my present existence—no great blessing indeed, as matters have since turned out ! But futurity is mercifully concealed from investigation, and at that period of my life I had powerful and interesting ties to the world, from which to have been torn, would then have proved agony in the extreme.

“ In the accidental but tranquil retirement of the rock, I enjoyed the consolation of my little cherub’s presence for some time. My father’s absence, as I expected, was prolonged; and Margaretta’s daughter had not yet concluded her reckoning. At length the hour of separation arrived :—a bitter one it was ! but no alternative remained; the young woman was unexpectedly delivered of a dead child. I sympathized in her disappointment, but, nevertheless—shall I confess it?—that

vile, interested maxim* of Rochefoucault's intruded itself; and I acknowledged the force of the observation, even while reprobating the nature of it as inhuman, unworthy, and selfish. But the temporary feelings of the mother triumphed over every other consideration; and the idea that my infant would now experience the undivided tenderness and attention of her to whose care I was under the cruel necessity of consigning him, inspired me with a degree of satisfaction almost too potent to conceal.

“ The tear of recollected disappointment stole down the pale cheek of Janette as she received my precious deposit into her arms, and pressed his little form to that bosom, from whence her own child was not destined to derive the customary sustenance.

“ My husband had hitherto been kept ignorant of this transaction; I concealed from him all the circumstances now related, from an apprehension that anxiety for my situation might possibly make him conclude me worse than I really found myself, and of course be the means of hurrying him to Narbonne, in spite of every probable consequence;

* “ In the misfortunes of our best friends we frequently find something that does not displease us.”

a step

a step now doubly dreaded till my health was fully re-established, and which rendered me particularly cautious in the nature of my communications.

“My recovery advanced, however, slowly; not so with the nominal mother of my poor little boy: she was soon able to join her husband, who now, become impatient for her return home, insisted upon its being no longer delayed, several excuses having already been fabricated for that purpose. As he was naturally of a harsh, surly disposition, obedience was at length judged expedient, and his wife accordingly prepared for her departure; but what words can describe, what language express the sad—alas! the final separation that took place between myself and the dear image of my beloved St. Hypolite!—No, I am unequal to the task! Suffice it to say, that a melancholy presentiment of impending evil hung over my spirits, and as I gave him from my arms for ever, a chill and heavy sensation pressed upon my heart; it seemed to die within me; pulsation ceased for a moment; in the following instant every vein throbbed with renovated violence, and recollection wrung my tortured bosom to agony. Alas! the last embrace of maternal affection sealed, irrevocably sealed his destiny, and I was pre-ordained by Providence to be the unconscious means of his destruction!

destruction!—But reflections of this nature lead—ah! whither do they not lead? Let me hasten from them, ere distraction is again the consequence.

“ I returned to the Castle, where I had now once more taken up my residence, pursued by a continual train of the same mournful and gloomy forebodings which incessantly preyed upon my mind, and seemed to prognosticate some fatal occurrence; from the alarming conviction of which I found it utterly impossible to free my depressed imagination, and debilitated mind.”——

During the latter part of the last sentence, Charlotte's attention was divided by a circumstance that excited no small degree of curiosity and surprise. A footstep seemed to tread softly on the other side of the altar, and more than once a faint, hollow sound, like a blow or a knock, apparently issued from a neighbouring pillar; but Madame de Narbonne did not appear to observe it, and her companion therefore supposed that the slight gust of wind, which at intervals swept over the chapel, had deceived her. At the moment of forming this conclusion, a female figure emerged from behind St. Hypolite's monument; and beckoning the Countess as it glided near her, vanished so immediately from view, that it was scarcely possible to ascertain

ascertain whether the object proved really what it resembled, or an illusion of the senses. Charlotte silently followed its course with her eyes, till the last imaginary trace was no longer visible, and the thickening shadows of intervening objects excluded every chance of further observation. A door was now heard to close gently in the same quarter from whence the vision had first appeared. The whole transaction occupied merely a few moments, and had passed with all the instantaneous velocity of thought; but the last discovery served to convince her that there was nothing supernatural in the case, and she instantly turned to Madame de Narbonne for an explanation, who had her watch in her hand, and was rising from her seat. Without returning any direct answer to Charlotte's look of enquiry, the Countess, with some indications of emotion on her countenance, proposed adjourning to the saloon, where she said it would be necessary to leave her for a short period. Mademoiselle de Córdet well knew her dislike to be questioned relative to those subjects on which she felt any repugnance to enter, and prepared to obey without making a single comment on the occasion; when the other, after a short pause, turned back, and acquainting her she had changed her mind, requested she would remain in her present situation till such time

time as she joined her again in the same place. In this Charlotte likewise acquiesced; and the Countess, following the track marked out by the late visionary-looking messenger, disappeared at the identical door, the closing sound of which had partly ascertained the corporeal nature of her who recently passed through it, and given

“ To airy nothing a local habitation* ;”

though the “ name,” by which it was to be distinguished, still remained unknown to her.

In about a quarter of an hour’s time Madame de Narbonne returned, and approached the side of the chapel, where Charlotte was now standing before a fine piece of painting which had attracted her notice. The countenance of the former was equally sad, but more composed than at her departure. She made no offer to recommence her narrative, however, but merely observed that she understood they were enquired for at the Castle, to which it was, therefore, become necessary to repair.

“ I hoped,” said she, “ at leaving it, to have brought my melancholy story nearer a crisis, but affliction is greedy of procrastination; I have unconsciously moralized on the sorrows of life till time stole past me unheeded. Happily, the intelli-

* Shakespear.

gence I have just received, renders a short interruption of little importance, for I am now informed that no daughter of Joseph the Second's is called to the throne, or any idea entertained of such a wild transaction being attempted; in short, the rumour mentioned by Mr. Hastings is totally contradicted, and appears to be entirely void of foundation. Suspecting the report had occasioned me some uneasiness, that worthy and considerate friend has taken no small trouble to ascertain the truth; and dispatched Margaretta, whom he accidentally met with at the Castle, to acquaint me with the result of his enquiries.

"But, my dear Madam," interrupted Charlotte, "it was not surely Margaretta who beckoned you from hence? Margaretta's figure ——"

"I know what you would say," interrupted the Countess in her turn, "but I have already told you that time will explain all things; wait then till the due period of discovery arrives; if my expectations are answered, your difficulties will increase with the development;—fortify then your mind with steadiness and resolution; the exigencies of the period will sufficiently require them."—She looked again at her watch.—"Let us return to the Castle; let us go," continued she, casting a mournful glance at the monument of her husband; "never do I quit this spot without feeling as if I was again
parting

parting from all most precious to my heart!—Oh, when will the fetters of mortality be broken? When will our union be once more completed in those happier regions?”

Madame de Narbonne offered a mental petition for resignation as she passed the receptacle of the lamented dead, and leaning on Charlotte's arm, proceeded to the Castle.

CHAP. II.

“ Had some good angel op’d to me the book
“ Of Providence, and let me read my life,
“ My heart had broke when I beheld the sum
“ Of ills, which one by one I have endur’d.

.....

“ That Power, whose ministers good angels are,
“ Hath shut the book in mercy to mankind.”

HOME.

BEFORE the ladies reached the Castle, they were met by Mr. Hastings, who perceiving their approach from one of the windows, immediately descended to join them.

By him they were now informed of the source from whence the recent intelligence he had sent the Countess was derived.

It appeared that, during their absence, two or
three

three gentlemen had arrived from the neighbourhood of Paris, who were evidently no strangers to the secret manœuvres of the Royalists; and finding that Mr. Hastings (with whom one of them was formerly acquainted) might safely be trusted, they mentioned, in confidence, several circumstances of importance to the cause, on the authenticity of which they assured him every degree of dependance was to be placed; and amongst others, the rumoured elevation of the Emperor's daughter to the throne of France was not forgotten. The chimerical but mischievous nature of such a report was reprobated by them in every point of view, and in fact they averred it was merely propagated to irritate and provoke the multitude to some new and bloody outrage.

“But gross food is requisite for vulgar stomachs,” added Mr. Hastings; “an assumption of superiority, in whatever degree, tolls the knell of their worshipped Equality, in the sound of the tocsin, by which their leaders instigate them to the commission of any new undertaking that their present views may require. Hence originate the wild and incongruous stories so frequently disseminated for the most baneful purposes. Wise men, indeed, may easily discover, and consequently despise such inconsistent absurdities, even while they shudder at
their

their probable effects. Politicians may condemn them as too openly pursued to be useful — politicians who seldom shrink from the means, provided the end, however sanguinary, can only be accomplished! but the low and ignorant ranks of society have little difficulty in comprehending those who excite them to rebellion, when told that by rebellion they will be enabled to seize the domain of their richer neighbour, and enjoy a situation in life equal to those whose condition their own has taught them to envy.”

Always considerably cautious how she mentioned the name of De la Ville in the presence of his unfortunate wife, Charlotte seized the first favourable opportunity for making some enquiries relative to the probable term of his absence. But on this subject no satisfactory intelligence could yet be obtained, and the ignorance they were left in respecting this man's fate, or the likely period of his unwished-for return, contributed in no small degree to keep the minds of those principally interested in that event, in an uncertain state of apprehension, ever liable to some disagreeable surprise.

Several trifling incidents having unavoidably occurred to retard their departure, the following evening was pretty far advanced ere the ladies found
and

an opportunity of quitting the Castle. To remedy, in some measure, this loss of time, they commenced their walk in a different, but somewhat nearer direction than the path usually pursued; the sky, however, soon became cloudy and dark, and though the moon at length came to their assistance, her influence was partially dispensed; she was often obscured by passing shades, and only sullenly peeped at intervals from her gloomy coverings. The wind too rose in sudden gusts as they advanced, and raved through the surrounding woods in temporary but wild fits of violence; while, during its transient suspensions, the howlings of the great dog at the outer gate of the Castle poured forth in terrific sounds, and prolonged by the repetition of some echoes in the neighbourhood, added an awful and tremendous solemnity to the scene.

“The evening grows worse,” said Charlotte; “had we not better return to the Castle?”

“No,” replied the Countess, with a heavy sigh, “I have encountered severer storms than the present, and fear not the fury of the warring elements. We will proceed! The approaching tempest suits the existing frame of my mind; alas! the smiling face of Nature has no longer any charms for me!”

Abсорbed

Absorbed in succeeding reflections, the Countess now silently moved on without appearing to notice any of the occurrences which attracted her companion's attention; the sky still exhibited a threatening aspect, but it was almost excluded from view by the high, thick, and interwoven foliage that bent over their heads in hollow murmurs, as it yielded to the rage of the tempest. To Charlotte the road had never displayed so many horrors, or conveyed an idea of such length; the gloom increased as they wound through the deepening and dreary shades of the forest. A solitary ruin lay in their way, and as they entered its mouldering arch, where the gate with its iron barriers had formerly impeded the steps of the traveller, her usual fortitude was nearly overcome by a wild and dreadful scream that seemed to issue from some being in the most excruciating agony of distress; and in the following moment she received a blow from a figure which brushed past her with uncommon velocity. Madame de Narbonne, who now leant upon her arm, roused by the involuntary exclamation which escaped her young friend in the first surprise of the moment, raised her eyes from the ground, and enquired what was the matter.

"I know not," replied Charlotte, in a tremulous accent; and was going to proceed, when a
repetition

repetition of the same fearful sound again appalled her.—Again she started, and again the Countess demanded the cause of her perturbation; but before she was able to give it, a discovery took place that rendered any explanation on her side unnecessary. A beam from the moon fell upon the top of the fabric, and a large owl, of unusual size, was seen resting upon one of the turrets, from whence it occasionally hovered over the half-decayed battlements, or circling through the ivy-covered arch, sent forth a hoarse and discordant note, as it skimmed along its aerial course.

“We are wrong,” said the Countess, looking round her; “I have been too much immersed in painful retrospections to observe which way we were going. Keep a little more to the right; we must not disturb the lonely inhabitant of these ancient walls; his mournful voice has often soothed my sorrows when no other comforter was at hand.”

Charlotte secretly blushed at the acknowledged cause of her recent perturbation.

“Such,” thought she, “are the never-failing effects of mental imbecility and idle superstition—such the consequence of weakly shrinking from steady investigation! Many a formidable legend, authenticated merely by oral tradition, and the seal of time, probably has no better foundation for the support of its credibility than what has now proved the basis of my

apprehensions. A childish dread of we know not what, deters us at the instant from entering into a thorough examination of the suspicious circumstances that may have occurred accidentally to alarm us. First impressions are forcible, and acquire additional strength according to the length they have to travel, or that inclination for the marvellous in their retailers, which seems to be inherent in our natures. Thus they receive a degree of stability rather from assertion than reality, which all the powers of reason and philosophy, in more enlightened dispositions, vainly attempt afterwards to eradicate from the ignorant and credulous minds of the multitude."

When the ladies had once more reached their former situation in the rock, Madame de Narbonne thus continued the thread of her eventful tale.

"I think I mentioned last night, that when I returned to the Castle, after parting with my poor little exile, an unusual heaviness and depression hung upon my spirits; alas! the scene of maternal misery I had just gone through was not long to be my only affliction. A dreadful one, even on this sad day, still remained to be experienced.

"For some hours after the separation with my little boy, I shut myself up in my own apartment, and endeavoured to acquire that command over
4 my

my feelings so necessary to exclude the prying eye of suspicion. But the practical part of philosophy is not quite so easily accomplished as the theoretical. It was long before reason obtained any triumph over the stronger sensations of affection and regret, and my tears would flow in spite of every argument I could summon to my aid for their suppression. At length I attained some degree of composure, and sat down to give my husband a particular detail of every material occurrence which had lately befallen me. He was already acquainted with my recovery; but no answer being received in return, I concluded it had probably miscarried, and under this idea congratulated myself on the cautious and mysterious manner in which my intelligence was worded. Fatigued with mental agitation, and the long letter I had just finished, I threw aside my pen, and took a solitary ramble through the shrubbery; a servant, on my return to the Castle, met me at the door of the saloon, and presenting a small packet, immediately retired.

“ The superscription was in my father’s hand; and as his absence had now been considerably protracted beyond the original term fixed upon, I naturally concluded this epistle was sent to acquaint me with the probable time of his arrival. Instantaneously struck with a recollection of the
C 2
goodness

goodness of Providence in the lengthened period allowed me to overcome the difficulties that had once, even in prospect, terrified my imagination, I secretly poured forth a warm effusion of gratitude to Heaven for all its indulgences, in the arrangement of those various and perplexing incidents of which the concealment was so immediately necessary to the present welfare of myself and others.

“ This critical and fortunate conclusion, I imagined, ought to dry up my tears, and hush repining into silence, for the temporary loss of my sweet infant. The circumstance appeared to be thus directed by my better angel for the purpose of consolation and submission to the decrees of Providence. After holding it unopened, with a sensation of reluctance, for which, in the existing state of my mind, I was utterly unable to account, I at length broke the seal, and before the first sentence was finished, fell extended and senseless on the floor !

“ The noise of my fall brought back the servant who had delivered the fatal epistle, and my maid being summoned, I was recalled in due time to a thorough recollection of that misfortune which had reduced me to the condition in which I was found.—My dear brother was no more ! An epidemical fever had terminated his existence, in the

West-Indies, on the third day of its appearance. My father seemed to write in the utmost distress; yet on a reperusal of his letter, when I was better able to criticize its contents, I could not help remarking that the sad event I so deeply deplored, appeared to be considered only as a secondary object, when put in competition with the high eulogium bestowed upon his own diplomatic abilities, through the flattering channel of Royal approbation in the two Courts of France and Germany. The latent but natural ambition of his mind had been powerfully gratified by the successful conclusion of his negotiation; and vanity, or rather pride, afforded a counterpoise in the empty applause of his employers, for the premature loss of an only and invaluable son.—So true it is, that the ruling passion, whatever it proves, invariably (if not wisely checked in time) acquires a dangerous ascendancy, and, like Aaron's rod, swallows up all before it!—In the same letter that conveyed this melancholy intelligence, accompanied by expressions of apparent regret, the Count failed not to hint, in pretty strong terms, at the increase of consequence his public character and acknowledged abilities had procured him; which, in conjunction with my now splendid prospects, and dearly-purchased inheritance, were actually mentioned as

reasonable motives of consolation for the wounded feelings of sisterly affection to benefit by! My father likewise spoke of his own return as an event at no great distance; but long ere that circumstance took place, I flattered myself with the hope of hearing my child had safely reached the end of his journey—a piece of information I eagerly wished to receive.

“ The contents of the Count’s epistle had materially altered my situation, and of this it was requisite to acquaint my husband. The letter I had already written was still unsealed; the Lady Abbess had undertaken to get it conveyed by one of her domestics, who was going to the neighbourhood of Mount St. Cyprian; and, therefore, I summoned sufficient fortitude to make the mournful communication. Convinced I had little to fear for the probable safety of my packet by the present opportunity, I entered more minutely into particular details than, perhaps, I should otherwise have done, and dwelt on the numberless apprehensions and anxieties occasioned by a change so undesired and lamented as that which had now fallen to my lot—a change that, holding me up to public notice in a superior point of view, rendered my conduct and motions more liable to observation, and of course more critically difficult to
manage

manage with propriety. In the former part of this epistle, I restrained myself from expressing any wish for an interview, leaving it entirely to his own choice to take what measures he judged most expedient on the occasion. Now, however, I found myself under the necessity of coming to some decision more equal to the exigency of the moment. Perplexed and harassed with a thousand fears, I knew not how to proceed without an assistant hand to guide my steps; and therefore entreated to see him immediately at the usual rendezvous, that our present and future plans might be arranged with prudence and safety. In this request I told him I was seconded by the Lady Abbess, who joined with me in thinking his presence of the utmost importance at such a juncture; as the conduct I was to observe on my father's first arrival, would probably determine my destiny for ever. I concluded with hinting a wish that he would privately visit our infant before he set off for Narbonne, where I conjured him to hasten with all possible expedition, as the ardent desire I felt for this interview could no longer be suppressed.

“ The period was already elapsed in which I had been promised some account of my little exile; I grew inconceivably restless and uneasy; melancholy ideas assailed me on every side; the future

appeared in colours even more gloomy than the present, and I shrank with horror from the trials I should probably have to struggle with; for too well I knew there was nothing to be hoped from parental affection, where ambition would step forward to decide my fate.—Alas! my dearest brother, was not your loss sufficiently dreadful of itself, without the auxiliary aid of so many other apprehended sorrows?

“ I wandered perpetually to the cottage, in expectation of intelligence so necessary to my peace. One single word would have satisfied me on the subject; to know he was well—to hear he had not suffered by the length of his journey, was all I required. This all, however, was denied me, and nothing transpired on the much wished-for subject.

“ Margaretta became equally unhappy; she feared some accident had happened to prevent her daughter from writing; or, if that was not the case, concluded her letter must have miscarried. Day after day expectation was disappointed, and we were at last upon the point of sending the old man, her father, to investigate the cause of this unaccountable silence on a subject of such importance, when a dreadful explanation took place, that rendered the intended enquiries unnecessary.

“ I was

"I was sitting one evening with those good people, consulting how to proceed, when their son-in-law, pale, weary, and exhausted, abruptly entered the cottage. My heart died within me the moment I perceived him; but I had scarcely time to pronounce the name of his wife, before, looking expressively at her mother, he sunk into a chair, and burst into tears, exclaiming at the same time, that 'his fears were but too well founded; all, he saw, was over; that fatal river——'

'What river?' cried I, interrupting him in a frenzied tone, starting up, and grasping his arm as I spoke, 'what river?—Oh speak, for Heaven's sake! I conjure you tell me!'

'Alas! Madame,' replied the man in a mournful accent, confounded at my earnestness, and turning his eyes upon me for the first time, 'Alas! Madame,' said he, with a look I shall never forget, 'if you feel so much for the loss of your Ladyship's foster-sister, what must be my sufferings who have too certainly lost both a wife and a child?'

"The end of the last sentence was conclusive; I heard no more; fit after fit succeeded in constant rotation, and I was again conveyed with difficulty to my former apartment in the rock. It was rumoured at the Castle that the Convent was a second time my place of residence, and therefore

this absence created no suspicion. The worthy Superior repaired to my chamber on the first intelligence of my alarming situation, and, with her usual judgment and composure, gave the necessary directions on the occasion.

“ In spite of the friendly efforts used for my recovery, a blessed insensibility continued to deaden the force of that night’s affliction. Some opium, administered by the Lady Abbess, threw me at length, towards morning, into a sort of disturbed, irregular slumber, from which I awoke with a confused recollection of the preceding day’s occurrences: but no sooner was I able to discriminate them more clearly, than I insisted on knowing every particular circumstance connected with the fatal incident. This request was complied with reluctantly. The information to be procured proved, however, very limited. The young man was not at first, he said, much surprised at the lengthened period of his wife’s absence, as he imagined her parents had prevailed with her to prolong it; nevertheless it began at last to have a strange appearance, especially as no account whatever was received of her motions; though a former notification of them had acquainted him with the precise day fixed for her departure from Narbonne, with a positive assurance of no longer exceeding
the

the specified term of her return. As an alarming interval had intervened since the arrival of that information, and he knew her to be scrupulously exact in the observance of any absolute engagement, he naturally began to apprehend something very extraordinary must have happened to occasion so unaccountable a breach of promise. The idea of indisposition immediately suggested itself; and finding it gained ground by every day's disappointment, he became restless and uneasy till the truth was ascertained, and consequently formed the resolution of leaving home to investigate it.

“ For some time his search proved ineffectual; at length he reached a ford of the Garrone, which, though dangerous, shortened the way so considerably, that they had both been induced to cross it formerly. In passing he observed something that seemed to have been drifted to the opposite bank of the river, where it appeared entangled amongst the branches of the waving willows, whose drooping foliage here bent luxuriantly over the stream. Of this, after much difficulty, he obtained possession. It was of no great size, and had a leather covering, which guarded its contents against the destructive effects of the water. These contents, upon examination, proved to be several well-known articles of his wife's, and a few other things

belonging to the child. The last, he added, were rather indeed of a superior quality to what any of his family were entitled to wear; but he knew Mademoiselle Adelaide meant to make her foster-sister a present, and on that supposition his apprehensions were not lessened by the foregoing circumstance.

“ In short, my dear Charlotte, for I can dwell no longer on the minutæ of this heart-rending event, my lovely infant and his unfortunate nurse were both consigned to a watery and premature grave—swept in an instant from the face of the earth, and lost to me for ever!

“ Imperfect as this man’s account appeared, it was evident, too evident, that no room remained for the smallest degree of hope. I saw this sad truth in all its most horrid colouring; but I saw also that, bitterly as my loss was felt, I yet had not suffered so much as the wretched husband of the poor young woman. He imagined himself deprived of a wife and child by one fatal blow, (for he was ignorant of the imposition that had recently been practised by the substitution of my son in the place of his own, and therefore mourned over the infant’s early fate with all the anguish of disappointed affection). Thus his share of the dreadful catastrophe came nerved with a double portion of calamity;

calamity; while I, on the contrary, had at present but one single sorrow to struggle with, which, though felt with sufficient energy, was nevertheless trifling in the comparative scale of human misery. It is not the intrinsic weight of existing wretchedness, but the degree of sensibility possessed by the sufferer, and his mental ability to sustain misfortune, which ought to be considered on these occasions. Taken in that view, I was, perhaps, the most unhappy of the two; but the fact, agreeably to the superficial idea of common minds, was against me, and I felt the inutility of complaint even while my heart was bursting with anguish.

“ At length, however unwillingly, I prepared for my return to the Castle, where my presence was requisite, in order to make some arrangements previous to the Count’s arrival. My spirits were depressed, and my frame reduced almost to annihilation; I felt extremely weak, and finding myself unable to finish my walk without stopping to rest by the way, I entered the cottage for that purpose.

“ As I rose to proceed home, an exclamation of surprise and horror from my nurse’s husband, then at the door, was suddenly heard, followed by a faint and low answer, uttered in a voice which, thrilling through my heart, caused me to spring
hastily

hastily forward, with a velocity that the situation of my health would have made me suppose infinitely beyond every exertion of bodily strength a few minutes before it was attempted; when, Oh God! what a sight met my view!—How, ah how shall I continue the horrid relation?” cried the Countess, panting for breath, and in an agony of grief superior to any thing her auditor had hitherto witnessed. Charlotte was unusually alarmed; she saw the wild expression of countenance, which had formerly been remarked, again taking possession of every agitated feature, and she gazed upon her face with a sensation of solemn and fearful expectation.

A deep sigh at last burst from the bosom of the Countess; she emphatically fixed her late wandering eyes on one melancholy object—it was the cold and silent monument of St. Hypolite! A pause, still and awful as the final moment of dissolution, marked the secret emotion of her soul as it was occupied with this mournful contemplation. Another sigh escaped her; she raised her eyes, pressed her burning hands on her pallid forehead and throbbing breast, uttered a mental ejaculation, and in a faltering voice thus resumed her narrative:—

“ Even at this distant period of remembered anguish, my heart dies within me at the bare recollection of the past; every vein swells to bursting,
and

and the frenzied tumult in my brain almost *once more* points to distraction. I would proceed, but ——”

Again she panted for breath, and attempted to speak; but the effort was ineffectual, till a friendly flood of tears came to her relief, after which being somewhat more composed, she removed the handkerchief from her eyes, and continued as follows:—

“ I had been told by the Lady Abbess, that my cause for grief was not equal to that of the young man’s, who, in the supposed loss of a child, and the additional deprivation of a wife, had suffered a double portion of affliction. I had been told all this, and heard *submissive resignation* inculcated by every precept of religion best calculated to enforce its practice, till I almost weakly began to imagine myself exempted from some of the severer trials which fall to the lot of mortality; and at times, on a comparison with the situation of my fellow sufferer, I could not help raising my thoughts, in grateful acknowledgment, to that indulgent Power, who had mercifully left me still a wife, though no longer a mother. Alas! Heaven saw my presumption, and judged proper to repress it at the very moment I dared to arrange its mysterious decrees according to my own limited faculties! —Gracious God! what a chilling object blasted
my

my sight when I rushed forward, actuated by an impulse almost supernatural! My husband, my beloved, my adored St. Hypolite, covered with blood, a deathlike paleness on his countenance, and scarcely able to support himself, held out his arms to receive me, but, faint and exhausted, staggered back a few paces, and sunk on a seat at the door before I could reach him.

“ Every eye was instantly fixed, in motionless astonishment and horror, on the bleeding phantom who had thus unexpectedly appeared, like some terrific vision of the brain, before them; but it was a momentary suspension, occasioned by an incident so sudden and unaccountable. All soon became confusion and uproar; every possible assistance was speedily administered to the hapless object of general anxiety; and in the hurry this produced, I was utterly overlooked, till the wild scream of desperation that escaped me as I fell upon the floor, recalled their attention to my situation, after which I was carried to my nurse’s bed in a state of happy insensibility, from whence every effort to recover me proved for a long time ineffectual.

“ On the first returning dawn of recollected misery, I started up, and positively insisted on being conveyed to my husband. The request was judged improper to be complied with, and my enfeebled

enfeebled frame, now almost shook to dissolution, rendered me unable to proceed without assistance. I raved, I commanded, I threatened by turns; every persuasion used to turn me from this design was equally vain and unheeded, and rather served to strengthen my mind in its purpose, than answer the friendly view of the speaker. I concluded, from so strenuous an opposition, and the visible perturbation of my attendants, that a more decisive stroke than what I had recently witnessed remained to be unfolded; and therefore persevered to enforce compliance in a style they durst no longer dispute. At length I was supported to the bed-side of my dying St. Hypolite, from whom no human argument or consideration could afterwards separate me.

CHAP. III.

——— “ Expectation stood

“ In horror.”

MILTON.

“ Duncan is in his grave;

“ After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well.

“ Treason has done its worst; nor steel, nor poison,

“ Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing

“ Can touch him further!”

SHAKESPEARE.

“ **I**N every former occurrence of an afflictive nature, I had leisure to brood over my secret and solitary distress;—no foreign object required assistance, nor could any administered by me, call my thoughts effectually into another and less melancholy channel; of course nothing sufficiently forcible presented

presented itself to rouse my mind from the torpor of inertion, or the uninterrupted contemplation of individual sorrow.

“ Here the case was fatally more diffusive; all partial considerations disappeared before the dreadful circumstances of the moment!—My husband, my dearest husband was wounded—perhaps mortally wounded! and, heedless of my own corporeal weakness, my heart beat responsive to his sufferings, nor once bestowed a single thought on those that nearly reduced my emaciated frame to the peaceful verge of the grave. Insensible to the danger of discovery, careless of what might be conjectured on the subject, I left not his bed-side during two horrid days of torturing suspense, at the conclusion of which the surgeon who attended him pronounced all hopes of his recovery over!!

“ The decisive sentence that finally involved his fate, with every prospect of *my* earthly happiness, was communicated to St. Hypolite at his own particular request, though studiously concealed from me. He received it with that degree of calm resignation and manly fortitude which had never deserted him even in moments of the most excruciating agony.

“ At the period when his doom was thus sealed, I had been prevailed upon, with much reluctance,
to

to retire, in order to procure some repose. St. Hypolite assuring me, in the most earnest manner, that nothing but a knowledge of my compliance could possibly contribute to his ease of mind, I acquiesced, without being very sanguine in my expectations of deriving any material benefit from the experiment; but left not the chamber till I obtained a solemn and positive promise from the surgeon to remain in my place during the intended period of my short absence.

“ Unknown to myself, a composing draught had been infused in something I drank before retiring to rest; this co-operating with bodily fatigue, and anxiety of mind, threw me into a sleep rather profound than refreshing, from which I awoke not till far beyond the purposed term originally intended. Looking at my watch, I was confounded at the lapse of time, and hastily starting up, repaired instantly to my husband’s little apartment.

“ On perceiving my entrance, he immediately requested to be left alone with me, and this desire was accordingly complied with.

“ His voice seemed more languid than I had yet observed it; with increasing tremor at every step, I approached. The prophetic alteration, now, alas! too visible on his pallid countenance, chilled
me

me to the soul; the cold damps of death had already bedewed it in legible characters of dissolution! His late sparkling eyes had lost all their wonted intelligence; and, gradually glazing in their frames, fixed a mournful look of tenderness and intense regret on my convulsed features, never to be obliterated from the horrors of recollection. I gazed upon his once expressive face in silent anguish, as kneeling at the bed-side, my hand was feebly grasped in his, and pressed to the most faithful of human hearts, whose pulsation vibrated with difficulty, and appeared to be on the point of ceasing every movement for ever!

“ Fearful of losing the smallest word he might utter, and almost turned to stone by the powerful force of observation, I scarcely suffered myself to breathe, nor once attempted to interrupt the faint, and apparently painful effort he made to address me. At length, after a deep sigh—‘ Prepare yourself, my dearest Adelaide,’ said he, ‘ to meet the dispensations of a wise and unerring Providence with that degree of proper fortitude and equanimity which becomes—nay, I will say, is the absolute duty of every human being who respects himself, or entertains a just sense of what is due to his great and merciful Creator! This world is but a fallacious good, a short-trodden stage to eternity!

Life

Life itself is at best a weary passage to happier regions; and he whose journey is soonest completed, has most reason to think himself a fortunate traveller: besides, what is common to all, no one individual has any real cause to complain of. Accompanying circumstances, it is true, may prove more or less afflictive; but remember, my love, that to a mind, unconscious of intentional error, unwounded, undisgraced by the commission of evil, corporeal sufferings lose their sting, and the grave is deprived of its victory.—But—time with me draws to a conclusion—my dearest wife, I must leave you!!—Cherish my memory, cultivate an intimacy with my sister Magdeleine—she is prepared to love and esteem you.—Oh Adelaide! is it thus our future prospects of felicity terminate? thus, at so early a period, must I part with you!!

“ He raised his cold hand to his forehead, and covering his eyes, ceased to speak for a few moments; then heaving a deep sigh, resumed his discourse with more firmness, though in a lower voice.

‘ But why add to your misery by reflections of this nature? Yet a few years, and we shall be again united—united beyond the power of mortality to separate us!—Ecstatic certainty—consoling recollection! And shall not then the assured prospect
of

of a happy eternity support us under the horrors of this short, this transitory parting, my wife, my beloved Adelaide? Yes, it will—it must speak peace and resignation to hearts formed like our's!—These papers,' continued he, taking a parcel from the side of his pillow, and presenting them to me, 'these papers will inform you of what remains to be told relative to the particular circumstances immediately connected with my fate. You already know that I have been attacked, and reduced to my present state by the bloody hands of assassins in my way hither; the contents of this packet will explain the whole transaction, as well as the prior sources of it. During your late absence from my chamber, I employed the surgeon in writing those incidents, with the detail of which it was necessary to acquaint you: there is a letter enclosed for poor Magdeleine; you will send it as directed. My acknowledgments are due to this gentleman for the skilful and friendly attendance I have received from him; he is a worthy, deserving man, and as such I recommend him to your future good offices. Duprey's long and faithful attachment to me renders it unnecessary to take that trouble on his account; I trust he is already secure of your favour.—Adelaide! my dearest, my once, my still adored Adelaide, I go!—but go to rejoin our sweet infant,

infant, where no cruel, interfering accident can again snatch him from a fond parent's tender embrace!—Farewel! I would say more, for more yet falters on my parched and nearly motionless tongue; but, it will not be! Life is now receding quickly; to this final conclusion we must all come at last, and for this final conclusion have I gradually endeavoured to prepare your mind by every hint from the surgeon or myself that could be given without distressing you too prematurely, before the closing scene rendered a more explicit declaration requisite.'—Again he paused for breath; the cold damps of approaching dissolution trembled in heavy drops on his deathlike countenance; his once sparkling eyes no longer shone with their wonted intelligence; languid and fixed in their sockets, they moved not from the face of his wretched wife, apparently insensible to every other circumstance but the deep and dreadful anguish that overwhelmed her with feelings too acute for utterance. At length expiring nature seemed to make its last effort.—'Adieu, dearest of women!' he cried; 'I would—but no; again, it will not be!'—He ceased speaking; the words died upon his quivering lips; with a convulsive motion he grasped my hand to his breast, and while his eyes still dwelt upon

upon my face, expired with a deep and agonized groan.

“A fearful, a solemn silence now reigned around; I continued motionless, insensible, without once raising my head, or turning my aching eyeballs from the sad object that, like the basilisk, seemed to claim their undivided attention. I fainted not, however; nor did any exclamation of distress escape me. His voice yet vibrated on my ear; I felt as if apprehensive of losing the next sentence he might utter, and frenzied expectation froze up every reasoning faculty.

“Surprised at a stillness so long and unaccountable, the surgeon and my own maid at length entered the room. The cause of it was soon discovered, and every method put in practice to recal my dormant senses, and make me speak; but the texture of the brain proved too weak to sustain such an accumulation of wretchedness as I had lately experienced; it had sunk under the pressure, and all recollection of fifteen months’ existence is totally erased from my memory.”

CHAP. IV.

“ Nor am I in the list of them that hope;
“ Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless.
“ This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard,
“ No long petition—’tis but speedy death,
“ The close of all my miseries, and the balm.”

MILTON.

CHARLOTTE shuddered with horror at the conclusion of the last sentence, and her moistened handkerchief, wet with the celestial tear of compassion, dropped from the hand which had hitherto supported her throbbing temples.

The voice of the Countess no longer reached her; she endeavoured to suppress her emotion by attempting to discover the cause of her silence; and raising her heavy eyelids, saw this unfortunate woman sitting in a melancholy posture, with her looks intensely

intensely fixed upon the floor. In an instant she suddenly started from her seat, and walked with a quick, irregular step to the other side of the chapel. The lamps in that quarter had not been lighted, and the few that burned round the tomb of St. Hypolite seemed in unison with the foregoing scene; they were gloomy, dim, and to all appearance expiring; the feeble glare, now and then slightly reflected on the wall, afforded partial glimpses of Madame de Narbonne, as she glided along behind a distant row of pillars; but her form would have scarcely proved distinguishable, had she not been traced by the hollow-sounding aisle, whose vaulted pavement reverberated her steps upon the ear, and assisted the eager view of Mademoiselle de Cordet, whose sympathetic eye followed, with an undefinable sensation, the graceful wave of her flowing garments as she wound along, almost enveloped in the dark shades of night and awful obscurity.

In about a quarter of an hour she approached again, but suddenly stopped at the monument of her husband; the faint degree of composure she had recently struggled to obtain, once more deserted her; her head dropped upon the tomb; she clasped her arms round the cold, recumbent figure of St. Hypolite, and burst into an agony of tears. After some time spent in this manner, the Countess

retired to the opposite side of the altar, where Charlotte perceived her, as formerly, in a kneeling attitude, apparently pouring forth a fervent and solemn petition to Heaven for a due portion of patient resignation. At length, with a slow step, and melancholy look, she returned to her companion, and seating herself in silence, after heaving a deep and oppressive sigh, thus continued her story.—

“ Of the material occurrences which took place during this blessed state of mental annihilation, I was afterwards informed by others. My ill-fated husband had requested to be buried in this chapel; he even particularized the very spot where he wished to be laid; it was in that identical part of the fabric which had formerly witnessed our unfortunate union!—Alas! what must have been his reflections at the time on a reverse so unlooked-for, so dreadful, so unexpected? His desire, however, was religiously complied with, and the Father Confessor of the Convent, by the direction of the Lady Abbess, saw the last sad duties properly conducted. Previous to this transaction, it was judged eligible to remove me from the rock; I was, therefore, conveyed to the Nunnery, and closely confined in a distant but commodious quarter of the building, where my more than mother, the good Superior, saw me carefully attended, under her own
immediate

immediate inspection. It was, nevertheless, with much difficulty this arrangement was put in practice, and for some time it was found absolutely impossible to tear me from the cold, inanimate corpse of my beloved St. Hypolite, to whose gloomy apartment I had forced my way a few hours after being first carried from it, and wildly, though silently, clung to the dear remains with all the additional strength of insanity.

“ When deprived at last of that object so much cherished even in madness, the surrounding scene no longer possessed the smallest attraction for me; I neither spoke nor seemed to observe any thing whatever. The sustenance held to my lips was sometimes mechanically swallowed, sometimes refused, just as it happened; and persevering in a gloomy silence, I appeared to be equally lost to the world, with those, whose sad fate had so deeply affected my intellects. Fortunately my situation was ascribed to grief for the death of Narbonne. Establishing this idea in their own minds as the cause of my mental indisposition, the domestics at the Castle expressed no surprise at the choice of my residence, well knowing the predilection I uniformly evinced for the Abbess, and the consolation to be drawn from so copious a source of comfort.

“ It is now time to account for the ever-deplored event which had thus unexpectedly added the heavy loss of an adored husband to my other recent and cruel deprivations.

“ Stung to the quick by the preference which he could not but perceive St. Hypolite had acquired in my heart, and deeply mortified at the discovery of his duplicity, and my father’s subsequent conduct on the occasion, all of which he ascribed to the influence of the Chevalier—De Verney secretly vowed revenge, and left the Castle with a full determination of seizing the first opportunity for making his supposed rival feel the weight of his resentment. Had he then known who the Chevalier really was, my father would probably have soon learned the truth; but equally ignorant of that circumstance, as of the Count de Narbonne’s enmity to the House of St. Cyprian, we were fortunately spared any present uneasiness on so material a subject of apprehension. Of De Verney’s recent connection, by the marriage of his mother, with the latter family, I have already said, we entertained not the smallest suspicion; of course a mutual, though unintentional, imposition prevailed on both sides, and ended in the most fatal manner.

“ It was not till some time after his precipitate retreat from Narbonne, that this young man formed
the

the first idea of paying his mother a visit on her marriage with the Count de St. Cyprian, and the acquisition of his own new title, of which latter circumstance he had not yet judged proper to inform her; nor even once recollected that, as a parent, she had a right to expect this trifling piece of attention from an only child to whose very foibles (not to give them a harsher name) she had hitherto been imprudently indulgent.

“ In a pause of dissipation he at length recalled to remembrance the incumbent duty of personal congratulation, and the propriety of communicating some part at least of those transactions in which his own affairs were particularly implicated, to this almost forgotten mother; and he set off for Mount St. Cyprian accordingly, instigated I believe in fact, however, more by the hope of drawing some pecuniary advantages from Madame de St. Cyprian’s blind partiality, than led by any motive of filial affection or decency.

“ This visit opened a prospect to several new resources, from whence he might derive no small benefit in any future case of necessity; and such cases were seldom beyond his catalogue of probable events, for amongst other vices to which he gave unrestrained licence, that of gaming was not the

least destructive, and frequently involved him in the most difficult situations.

“ His mother, totally unacquainted with the matrimonial engagement he had secretly contracted, (though, perhaps, had she been otherwise informed, the natural loose construction of her own principles would not have considered it as any very formidable impediment to her designs), was not long in communicating the deep-laid scheme over which she had for some time privately brooded; and De Verney immediately agreed with her that it was at least worthy of a trial. Worldly wisdom had never yet stigmatized what is vulgarly styled having “two strings to one’s bow” with the epithet of folly; and he imagined a fair opportunity now offered to prove that this old adage, like many others, had common sense for its basis; he consequently entered into his mother’s views with avidity, and speedily perceived with half an eye all the beneficial effects to be derived from them. She artfully recapitulated, with additional colouring, the different probabilities in their favour; and should “the thousand ills that man is heir to,” fail in some respects of answering the sanguine nature of their expectations, still it was possible that means might be fallen upon to injure
St.

St. Hypolite in the opinion of his father. The lady already knew her influence was extensive in that quarter; and, indeed, the short period of the Chevalier's residence at Mount St. Cyprian, together with a certain degree of mystery evidently connected with all his movements, laid him but too open, on the score of neglect, to the underhand machinations of his selfish opponents; who scrupled not to place his conduct in a light so prejudicial to the claims of filial duty, as to make a strong impression on the mind of an irritated father. And though it was to be feared this impression would disappear with his presence, yet they knew that the grounds of suspicion, true or false, once implanted in the parental bosom, are seldom entirely effaced, and of course furnish a gradual foundation for the future erection of any superstructure that may hereafter prove necessary for the fertility of human contrivance to increase at pleasure. Besides, St. Hypolite, though possessed of a superior understanding, was naturally of an open and ingenuous disposition, such as might render him a proper object to work upon, and by artful management, produce a thousand contingencies in their favour.

“Madame de St. Cyprian and her son perfectly

comprehended the force of that observation which tells us that—" *L'innocence n'est pas toujours une sûreté, parce que la malice va à son but par des artifices qu'un cœur droit ne peut imaginer, & contre lesquels, par conséquent, il lui est impossible de se garder.*"

"The best formed schemes are nevertheless liable to the interruptions of chance, and the most capital strokes of Generalship have sometimes proved ineffectual to obtain the wreath of victory. Should any unforeseen incident, therefore, occur to disappoint their views, either by the continuance of his life, upon returning to his former station abroad, or the lasting favour of the old Count—still a resource remained in Madame's step-daughter, whose fortune would be too considerably augmented by St. Hypolite's generous intentions to be overlooked in the chapter of calculation, now so ardently perused by these two able arithmeticians.

"Indeed, so prepossessing were the figure and address of De Verney, that his prudent parent entertained not the smallest doubt of positive success in the latter attempt, particularly now when the additional advantages derived from his late acquisition of fortune and rank were thrown into the scale. The lustre of the former she knew

only shone, however, with a borrowed light; for De Verney had told her a very different story on the subject from the real one;—but though secretly acquainted with this circumstance herself, there was, she thought, no absolute necessity for communicating the extent of her knowledge to those from whom it might, perhaps, be convenient to conceal it.

“ On the final accomplishment of this prudent and profitable scheme were the united wishes of both the mother and son most devoutly fixed, when my husband paid his second visit at Mount St. Cyprian.

“ The astonishment then evinced on the discovery that took place on both sides, has already been related, and each party saw the necessity of adopting a cautious and circumspect line of conduct, such as the immediate nature of their situation required. Yet it was not without many internal struggles that St. Hypolite accomplished this partial conquest over every nobler feeling which involuntarily revolted at the idea of finding an unprincipled character, like De Verney, apparently on so intimate a footing under his father's roof. Magdeleine shrunk with horror from the precipice on which she stood, and gratitude to a

D 6

brother,

brother, whose critical communication had probably snatched her from the brink of destruction, drew the bonds of affection still tighter between them.

“ De Verney had now a double motive for hating the Chevalier; he looked upon his supposed rival at Narbonne, and the brother of Mademoiselle de St. Cyprian, as equally inimical to his wishes, and failed not to let her understand to whom he imagined himself indebted for past and present disappointments, though the nature of the former was not particularly explained. The hints he threw out seemed, however, to glance at deeper concealments than it was imagined had yet been penetrated. Magdeleine trembled for her brother, and her brother shuddered to think of my sufferings, should a discovery of our secret have been effected. De Verney fortunately was not so well informed as they apprehended; but his artful insinuations, joined with the contents of my letters to St. Hypolite, forced the latter, on prudential accounts, to refrain from seeing or almost writing to me, lest any thing should transpire on the subject to injure our peace, either now or hereafter: and the dread of his spurning at every difficulty or danger to join me at the rock, if acquainted with my premature delivery, induced me, as I have
already

already told you, to withhold every intelligence of the kind, till a more propitious period arrived for the interesting communication. In the meantime regimental business again required his personal attendance in the metropolis; he therefore settled the means of a correspondence with his sister, and took another temporary leave of the Mount, in hopes something might occur in the *interim* to alter the aspect of domestic affairs.

“ An absence so apparently well-timed presented an opportunity not to be lost by De Verney. All expectations from me seemed now finally over; and suspecting the Chevalier was at length intimidated by what he had dropped for that purpose, he speedily became too audacious to admit of trifling with any longer. Magdeleine had been forced to temporize, but her fortitude and forbearance were at length nearly exhausted; she had almost wearied out every *item* of both in the vain expectation of detaching the Baron's thoughts from her brother's affairs prior to my confinement. When the effects of that circumstance were once fairly surmounted, if the threatened tempest could not be averted, things would then, perhaps, remain in a less critical state, and might consequently take their course.

“ So

“ So reasoned poor Magdeleine ! but she also was ignorant of what had befallen me, and therefore underwent daily proofs of patience, and trials of temper, accompanied by many an anxious wish for the final term of her sufferings, for which my recovery from child-bed was to be the signal.

CHAP. V.

“ His thoughts were low,

“ To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds

“ Timorous and slothful.”

MILTON.

“ **BETWEEN** the period of De Verney's departure from Narbonne, and his arrival at Mount St. Cyprian, he renewed a former intimacy, which had suffered an accidental interruption, with the present notorious Marat, not Austin, but the sanguinary wretch who has so frequently died the streets of Paris with the blood of his fellow-citizens! This man, even at that early period of life, was equal to any deed of vice, be its atrocity ever so great. At the bare recollection of his detested name my very soul shudders, and every mental faculty

faculty shrinks from the agonizing remembrance with horror!—Oh Heavens! why ——”

The voice of the Countess faltered as she paused at the last sentence; her colour went and came alternately; she panted for breath, and her whole frame seemed dreadfully agitated. Mademoiselle de Cordet had, more than once, remarked the visible emotion occasioned by any accidental recurrence to this bloody monster's name; and, had she not already been convinced that some deadly mystery was connected with it, the wild, wandering, and terrified looks of Madame de Narbonne would at this time have converted her former suspicion into certainty. She attempted to turn the conversation on other subjects; but the Countess, inattentive to her discourse, soon interrupted it, and after a desperate effort to suppress the violence of her feelings, again commenced her narrative in the following words.

“ To what a miserable state of debility is the mind sometimes reduced by the subduing hand of affliction! Mine, once injured and wandering in the mazes of insanity, is but too apt to enter the same labyrinth when scared from the common path by the tormenting offices of a lacerated memory. I am pained on reflection by the many instances exhibited of my mental weakness; but when the awful
malady,

malady, that formerly deranged my intellects, is considered, I flatter myself these circumstances will be ascribed to the right cause, and not attributed to a blameable failure of exertion, when the hand of Providence has removed the requisite portion of human fortitude beyond my power of attainment. Alas! the melancholy conviction that such is too frequently the case, weighs heavy on my heart, and the sad knowledge of this fact adds an additional load to misfortunes already sufficiently heavy for the shoulders on which they are laid. Oh! why is not every trace of reason entirely annihilated, or the festering chain of recollection snapped in twain for ever?—But, again I wander; again my poor brain is on fire! I feel, ah! how bitterly feel through every vein!—I must quit you once more, my dear Charlotte; excuse the direful necessity—I will join you immediately.”

The Countess left her seat at the conclusion of these words, and kneeling by the tomb of St. Hypolite, on which her arms rested, she reclined her face upon them in silent meditation, and soon after repaired to her former seat near the altar.

“The burning fever here,” said she, pressing her hand upon her temples, “is somewhat allayed; I will therefore proceed while any degree of composure is left me.

“The

“ The man who was destined to steep my days in anguish, has recently made too conspicuous a figure on the reeking stage of revolutionary horrors, not to be reprobated where known. You, my friend, have often spoke of this dæmon of destruction in powerful terms of detestation; and I think once mentioned that Lavater formerly drew his character in terms exactly correspondent with the conduct he has latterly pursued. You have happily, however, hitherto escaped all personal knowledge of a being so totally sunk in depravity, and lost to all that is good; I will, therefore, just repeat what an English author of much celebrity says on the subject, which, from a prior acquaintance with his principles, will forcibly corroborate the learned physiognomist’s opinion.

“ Nature,” says this agreeable writer *, “ has not been partial to Marat in point of looks; he is a little man, of a cadaverous complexion, and a countenance exceedingly expressive of his disposition. To a painter of massacres Marat’s head would be inestimable. Such heads are rare in this country, yet they are sometimes to be met with at the Old Bailey.”

“ What a companion was this for the already

* Vide Moore’s Journal.

corrupted heart of the Baron de Verney! Flexible to every impression of evil, he could not fail of profiting by the instructions of so able a master; while Marat, on his side, speedily entered into his views relative to the family of St. Cyprian.

“Convinced, from every possible observation, that my husband and his sister trembled for the disclosure of some important secret, De Verney ceased not, by ambiguous hints, as I have already said, to instil a persuasion of the extent of his information on this head, of which, nevertheless, it afterwards appeared he knew very little; but conscience whispered that “such things were,” and Magdeleine’s heart beat an alarm to the conviction.

“Somewhat thrown off her guard by the patient bearance and forbearance of her daughter-in-law, Madame de St. Cyprian became more urgent for the projected union with her son. She even ventured to mention her wishes to the old Count; insinuating, at the same time, that Magdeleine’s happiness was deeply implicated, and so far at stake as to endanger her peace, or at least making her follow her sister’s example, in bidding a final adieu to the world, if disappointed in an object so dear to her future hopes.

“To know Madame de St. Cyprian’s desires, and comply with them when known, were synonymous

mous terms in the opinion of her husband. He was pleased at the thought of a closer connection between the families, and no less captivated with the Baron's plausible, and, when he chose it, fascinating manners. Of the young man's real character he remained entirely ignorant, and imagined, while promoting Madame's gratification, he was considerably forwarding the wish of his daughter, by the advancement of a match apparently so desired on all sides.

"Magdeleine had now too many opponents to contend with; and she was finally compelled to acquaint the Chevalier with her situation. As to any hope of interesting the feelings of parental affection by a candid confession of unconquerable repugnance to an union with the Baron de Verney, she ventured not to indulge it. Indeed the attempt would have proved next to impracticable, if such an idea had occurred; for it appeared a decided point to exclude her from every opportunity of trying any expedient of the kind, by bestowing a watchful and unceasing attention on all her motions, and daily acquiring an additional degree of influence over the indolent and imbecile mind of the Count de St. Cyprian.

"On receiving his sister's intelligence, my husband immediately flew to her relief. The
Baron

Baron met him with an insolent air of triumph, and a look that seemed to say—"You are in my power, and therefore must be silent."—This reception was but ill adapted for conciliating the other's favour, had it even been possible to obtain it.

"The native nobleness of St. Hypolite's mind burst forth, as Magdeleine feared, on receiving the communication she was under the necessity of making him.

"Provoked beyond bearance, to think his father was the unresisting dupe of such artifice and palpable deceit, and the only remaining sister their cruelty had left him, on the point of becoming a sacrifice to the most worthless of human beings, he instantly demanded a private conference with the Count.

"De Verney was out on a fishing party, and Madame de St. Cyprian, not relishing the Chevalier's obvious frame of mind, would gladly have dispensed with this intended visit to her husband. He persisted, however, in his purpose, and the lady at length found compliance necessary. She, nevertheless, endeavoured to provide against the worst, and therefore took care to place herself at a convenient distance where the conversation that passed must unavoidably reach her.

"The

“ The fruits of her curiosity, thus *honourably* acquired, were speedily communicated to De Verney at their next interview; and the result of my husband’s intelligence was easily understood, when the Baron’s request to visit his father-in-law was evaded under pretence of the latter’s indisposition.

“ A guilty conscience generally saves the accused much trouble. It whispered a thousand probabilities on the present occasion, and his rage knew no bounds. Revenge now totally engrossed every thought; from a temporary impulse it became diabolically stationary, and ceased not to impel him forwards in the commission of the blackest atrocities, till the final ruin of those he conceived his opponents was irrevocably fixed.

“ Determined, nevertheless, to ascertain, as far as possible, what impression had been made by St. Hypolite’s information on the mind of his father, another attempt was soon put in practice for procuring admittance to the old Count’s apartment, without being attended with better success than the former one, though a letter was then delivered him, which he tore open with every mark of impatient curiosity.

“ The contents of this informed him that M. de St. Cyprian was not yet at leisure to receive him, but if his purposed visit related to the late
matrimonial

matrimonial negociation, he was henceforth to consider that transaction at an end. Other views were now entertained for Mademoiselle de St. Cyprian, which some recent circumstances had rendered it necessary to adopt, and with which the Baron de Verney could not possibly have the smallest connection hereafter.

“ Scarcely allowing himself time for the perusal of this note, De Verney flew to his mother, and, in accents of deep irritation, recapitulated the contents. Rage and agitation rendered him almost inarticulate, but she quickly perceived that the paper he held was the cause of it; snatching it, therefore, out of his hand, and hastily running it over, she rushed from his presence with the air of a fury, and endeavoured to force her way into her husband's chamber.

“ St. Hypolite appeared at the door, and in a voice of cool determination, desired to be excused from disobeying his father, who had recently given positive orders not to be disturbed. The lady trembled with passion, lest that portion of domestic authority, so long appropriated solely to her own jurisdiction, should henceforth be vested in a son-in-law, whose superior virtues and moral integrity rendered him truly detestable in her own eyes, and those of her colleagues. So certain it is

is that vice ever abhors that goodness in others which is frequently considered as a tacit satire on itself:—thus while publicly joining, from motives of self-interest, in the tribute usually paid to superior merit, but secretly stung by the humiliating comparison conscience forces upon the feelings, no mode of private injury is left untried for reducing every character to a level with its own, which it imagines the approbation of the world has sanctioned, or unerring propriety of conduct held up as a contrast worthy of imitation.

“ Madame de St. Cyprian, after making several unavailing efforts for the accomplishment of her present scheme, from whence she hoped to draw sure omens of future success, at length judged it requisite to fall into fits, which, alas! proved equally unserviceable to the attainment of her wishes, and were carefully concealed from the old Count’s knowledge, for whose observation they were principally exhibited.

“ De Verney stormed, threatened, and talked of vengeance by turns; and the thought of her brother being exposed to danger on her account, was too much for the affectionate heart of poor Magdeleine. She endeavoured to sooth the enraged Baron; she expostulated, she tried every probable method to calm the irritability of his temper.

‘ Will

‘ Will you agree to marry me instantly?’ he cried. ‘ That is the only step to convince me of your sincerity—the only atonement which can be accepted for the insult offered to my mother and self.—Say—speak! away with useless procrastination—tell me your intention at once!’

“ Magdeleine snatched her hand from his grasp with an involuntary sensation of disgust, accompanying the motion with words no less expressive of a determined refusal. He turned from her with an affectation of contempt, which but ill covered the extent of his disappointment, swearing, as he quitted the room, that he despised the whole family, and would enforce the belief of this fact by the manner in which he should treat them hereafter.

“ He immediately retired to his mother’s apartment. Having remained about half an hour there, his carriage drove to the door; he entered it, absorbed in a fit of gloomy silence, and instantly left the house.

“ The sound of De Verney’s carriage had scarcely died away, before Magdeleine heard the voice of her brother impatiently enquiring if his horses were yet ready; and almost in the same moment saw him enter the room, indignation and anguish evidently blended on his fine features.

“ Struck with the horrid probability that now

all at once presented itself, Mademoiselle de St. Cyprian gave a wild look of despair, and immediately dropped from her seat. She doubted not but a challenge had concluded the transactions of the day, and her eyes opening on a paper which had fallen from her brother's pocket as he flew to her assistance, they closed almost instantaneously a second time.

 CHAP. VI.

“ Who aspires, must down as low

“ As high he soar'd, obnoxious first or last

“ To basest things.

“ High arbiter

“ Chance governs all.”

MILTON.

“ **U**NWILLING to leave her under the influence of so painful an error, and equally averse to the presence of a servant, whose vicinity must of course prevent every attempt at an explanation, at a period when time became doubly precious, St. Hypolite used every possible effort for his sister's recovery; and at length made her sensible that her supposition was fallacious, by reading the contents of the paper which had originally occasioned

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her

her so much alarm, as the principal mobile of his actions.

“ It was the letter I had recently sent him, containing an account of my situation, accompanied with directions to find the place of his child’s residence.

“ He solemnly assured her no challenge had yet passed between the Baron and him; nor did he apprehend such a circumstance was likely to happen, from his knowledge of the man’s character, who, whatever advantage he might be capable of taking when his own personal safety was out of the question, would, he was persuaded, run no voluntary risk of endangering that by an open appeal to either sword or pistol, in the fair field of honourable combat.

“ The air of indignation which Magdeleine fancied visible on the Chevalier’s countenance, now struck her in a different point of view, and appeared merely to be produced by the various sensations my intelligence had given birth to.

“ At this period they were alarmed by a sudden cry of terror, and St. Hypolite rushed out to enquire the cause of it.

“ Madame de St. Cyprian, understanding her son was gone, and the Chevalier likewise preparing to depart, had been seized with the same idea as Magdeleine,

Magdeleine, and a similar effect was the consequence of her apprehensions.

“ Unable to be so careful of falling with safety as in many of her more systematical fits, she had now struck her head against the edge of a door, and cut it so deeply as to terrify those around her. She was speedily raised, however, and conveyed to her own chamber, where the surgeon found her speechless on his arrival; but a dearer interest urging dispatch, St. Hypolite, after giving proper directions to her attendants, consigned her to the care of this gentleman, and leading his sister to the old Count's apartment, broke the matter in as gentle terms as possible.

“ A severe indisposition, under which he had for some time laboured, still confined him to his room; nevertheless it was with no small difficulty he was now restrained from leaving it to see his wife.

“ Though irritated in no small degree by the imposition practised respecting De Verney's character and views, with which he once suspected her equally acquainted, though, in fact, that was far from being the case, his mind, ever wavering and unsteady, already began to reproach him with unkindness, and too hasty a disposition to resentment. This idea once admitted, led him almost

to repent of the length his displeasure had carried him, in excluding her from his presence; and he even imagined himself in some measure responsible for the cause of her recent illness, by a harshness of conduct which, however her son's proceedings might merit it, was probably not due to her, whose feelings on the occasion were, perhaps, as much to be pitied as his own; particularly (as he now endeavoured to persuade himself) if she remained really ignorant of De Verney's duplicity and criminal intentions relative to the projected union with Magdeleine.

“ St. Hypolite was too clear-sighted not to perceive the situation of his father's thoughts, and the discovery filled his heart with regret. But while he secretly deplored the weakness of the man, the errors of the parent were respected; and filial duty led him to adopt that line of conduct which, though firm, was yet least calculated to shock those prejudices he found himself unhappily inadequate to remove. To quit the family in its present state was, however, not to be thought of; and to remain, after what I had written him, no less distressing. A worthy, sensible woman, sister to the late Countess, resided in the neighbourhood. Her visits at Mount St. Cyprian had not been frequent since the second marriage of its master;

master; she was, nevertheless, so far softened by the tears and entreaties of her niece (who now waited upon her, and employed all her rhetoric on the occasion), as to be prevailed upon to accompany her back; and the Chevalier had the pleasure of seeing his sister, under her protection, comparatively easy before he left her.

“ It was not till the evening of the second day that he reached the specified abode of his little infant. There, however, every enquiry proved fruitless on the subject nearest his heart; neither the nurse, her husband, or child were to be met with, nor could he obtain any satisfactory account concerning their motions. The house stood in a lonely situation; the few neighbours in the vicinity appeared to know little about them, further than that Jean Jacques had expected his wife and child for some time past: and surprised at receiving no tidings of their return, had set off for his father-in-law’s residence, to discover the cause of an absence so strangely procrastinated.

“ Disappointed and dissatisfied with intelligence so uncongenial to his wishes, so different from those he had indulged during his journey, St. Hypolite again examined the contents of my letter, and from thence concluded some very extraordinary incident, which he could not comprehend,

must have intervened to detain them on the road.

“ With a beating heart he bent his course to Narbonne, sending his servant on before at every stage to have fresh relays of horses in readiness. When the end of his journey was nearly attained, he observed a fellow pass him at full gallop, and join two other riders, whom he had remarked were travelling the same road, at a distance behind him, after which they struck into a wood, where he entirely lost sight of them.

“ About a mile from Narbonne there was a small village, from whence he determined, as had formerly been done, to send back his post-horses to the town he had last got them from, and to proceed to the cottage on foot.

“ A degree of lassitude, which had hung about him all day, without being able to assign any very particular cause for it, now increased to such a height as to become quite oppressive. The sun was yet high, and he wished not to appear at Narbonne till the shades of evening began to thicken around him. On examining his watch, he found, with much amazement, that some time must still elapse before that period arrived, and consequently determined to indulge the inclination for a temporary cessation from fatigue that now irresistibly

irresistibly pervaded every feeling;—he therefore threw himself down on a bed in the only spare room of the little inn, in expectation of obtaining some repose before his servant again made his appearance.

“ The absence of his attendant was, however, prolonged much beyond the allotted time. St. Hypolite, impatient to reach Narbonne, and astonished at Duprey’s tardy motions, no sooner found himself able to proceed with more alacrity, than quitting his humble couch, he resolved to pursue his journey alone, leaving orders for his man to follow according to directions formerly given him.

“ The evening was now advancing apace, and before he penetrated to the middle of the forest, twilight spread her last sober mantle over the scene around him. He perceived, nevertheless, that there would still be more light than was suitable to the purpose of concealment, if his steps continued to keep in unison with that degree of impatient ardour which had hitherto impelled him forwards; and consequently proceeded at a slower rate.

“ Once or twice imagining he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, which he naturally concluded were Duprey’s, the Chevalier stopped to
E 5 listen;

listen; but the faint noise that gave birth to this idea, was no longer perceptible, and therefore supposing himself mistaken, he walked on again.

“ At length reaching the private path that led directly to the Rock of Narbonne, on one side of the forest, he turned into it, and almost at the same instant heard a repetition of a similar sound to what had already struck him. In momentary expectation of Duprey's arrival, he looked to the quarter from whence the noise seemed to come, and was on the point of ascertaining the truth by enquiry, when a violent blow fell upon his left arm, which, had it reached any of the nobler parts, where it was evidently aimed, must speedily have decided his destiny.

“ Stunned by a salutation so utterly unexpected, but retaining his usual presence of mind, my husband snatched a pistol from his pocket, and firing it almost at random, fortunately wounded his assailant in the shoulder; but this circumstance, instead of intimidating his cowardly opponents (for they were three in number), only irritated them on to acts of keener vengeance. A well-directed stroke, however, was so luckily timed as to render another of the party unable to continue the conflict; but the third, who appeared to be

to be the chief, and had hitherto escaped any material injury, must inevitably have proved too much for St. Hypolite's remaining strength, had not his servant at this moment most critically joined him, and by a sudden application from the but-end of his fire-arms, levelled him to the ground. In this manœuvre Duprey evinced a self-possession truly meritorious; for his master was then so closely engaged with the assassin, that a single touch of the trigger would probably have determined the fate of both at the same juncture.

"During the period of this contest, the two villains who had previously suffered, recovered in some degree from the effects of their temporary overthrow; but still weak and stunned, rather than materially hurt, their fears magnified the number of St. Hypolite's new reinforcement to such an extent, that, judging it prudent to make a timely retreat, they contrived to elude observation, aided by the shelter of some neighbouring underwood, and accomplished their escape before the smallest suspicion of such an intention occurred to the opposite party.

"Thus relieved from the power of these ruffians, my husband, after his faithful attendant had torn a pocket-handkerchief and neckcloth into bandages for his principal wounds, and taken a

little breath, endeavoured to reach Margareta's cottage, on the confines of which he dispatched Duprey for a surgeon; and proceeded afterwards with much difficulty, considering, as he slowly moved along, on the most proper mode of making me acquainted with what had befallen him, so that I might be as little alarmed as possible. You know what followed, and therefore will spare me the repetition of the melancholy tale. Life, and its once gay prospects, closed upon me from that moment, and the cold but peaceful grave has uniformly been looked upon as the only asylum for the wretched widow of St. Hypolite to repose her sorrows in!—There I shall at least find rest, and there I trust, ere long, I shall be a willing inhabitant!”

As Madame de Narbonne concluded the last sentence, the gloomy aspect of surrounding objects became more strikingly impressive by the near extinction of two of the largest lamps, which had been upon the point of expiring for some time. Deeply meditating on the probable frame of mind in which the Countess was then indulging, the eyes of Charlotte were still fixed upon the dim, glimmering, and irregular gleams of light that at intervals faintly illumed the opposite walls, and threatened at every succeeding moment to cease for ever, when a sigh from the other side of the altar

altar caught her attention, and immediately after a figure in white was transiently seen gliding behind the pillars in the principal gallery; but it disappeared so instantaneously, that she once more almost doubted the reality of so strange a circumstance.

Unable to account for an incident so unexpected, she was considering on the propriety of mentioning it to the Countess, when the silk curtain that hung before the organ was perceived to be gently agitated, and in a few moments after, low strains of divine harmony, solemn, soothing, yet sublime, broke upon the awful stillness of the place, and seemed to waft every thought to heaven. They were such as the spirit of the righteous is sometimes said to hear when, upon the verge of immortality, it waits for emancipation from its earthly fetters, and prepares to soar beyond the reach of sorrow, sickness, or human afflictions.

CHAP. VII.

“ Here frequent at the visionary hour,
“ When musing midnight reigns, or silent noon,
“ Angelic harps are in full concert heard,
“ And voices chanting.”

THOMSON.

FASCINATED by sounds so seraphic, Charlotte listened in profound silence for several minutes; at length the invisible musician changed the melody again to some of the strains she had formerly heard at the rock, and accompanied them in a voice almost celestial, though the extent of its powers was apparently restrained by some hidden cause, from the utmost exertion of perfection to which they were evidently equal.

All that had formerly occurred on this subject to excite curiosity, was now forcibly recalled to remembrance;

remembrance ; and Mademoiselle de Cordet found it no longer possible to repress that inclination for enquiry which she had hitherto endeavoured to restrain with tolerable success.

The sound of her companion's voice roused the Countess from a deep reverie ; she raised her head from the arm on which it rested, and fixing her humid eyes on the gallery where the organ was placed, heaved a deep and lengthened sigh. After a short silence—"Alas !" said she, "how inconsistent are human wishes ! how blind to the present, how idly solicitous about the future ! Even freedom from the chances of change and sorrow, is inadequate to inspire us with sentiments of gratitude and resignation to the will of Providence ; and some imaginary good unattained, some *ignis fatuus* in the illusive form of hope, still corrodes every enjoyment—still leads the mind to grasp at what is beyond our reach, rather than to rest satisfied with the wiser dispensations of Heaven ! Thus peaceful seclusion from the evils of life is too frequently stigmatized with the appellation of apathy and restraint ! Yet, ah ! when thrown upon a wide, an unfeeling world, and forced to perform the hard part assigned us by the resistless fiat of some dire necessity, then, and then only are we properly enabled to estimate the value of those negative blessings

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blessings we foolishly despised as insignificant and uninteresting."

Though born for an active and useful station in the sphere allotted her, Charlotte attempted not to controvert a mode of thinking which, in many instances, she knew had truth for its basis, besides the experience of numberless individuals from the first creation of the globe to the present instant. To ascertain the extent of its fallibility was not, therefore, her design at this juncture; but to obtain some knowledge of the mysterious musician undoubtedly proved a matter of no small importance. She perceived the attention her first question on this subject had met with, was by no means answerable to the measure of her curiosity; and consequently ventured to make a second attempt for the gratification of so troublesome an inmate.

"When we first adjourned to this place, for the purpose of entering upon my melancholy narrative," said the Countess, "the intelligence then received from Mr. Hatting's seemed to render an explanation of those topics you now advert to immediately requisite; and it was, therefore, my design to have acquainted you with the leading circumstances of an affair which, at that period, appeared to be fraught with relative consequences of much importance. Subsequent information, however,

however, altered my intentions on this head, and determined me to let the communication appear in its own place. I therefore, as you know, commenced the detail with my own history, which you will permit me to continue till such time as the existing cause of your enquiry can be duly introduced. I have already told you that all mystery shall be done away. Believe not, nevertheless, that there is any thing supernatural in the case;—no, sorrow or misfortune reach not aerial beings; like cowardly dispositions, they only tyrannize over those devoted wretches who cannot elude their baneful influence.”

Whether the invisible musician ceased of its own accord, or received some private signal for that purpose, is a matter of little moment. The sound of the organ, however, was no longer heard; a sudden gust of wind rushed through the fabric, and a distant door seemed closed by its violence; the noise it occasioned echoed for a few seconds along the vaulted aisles, and dying away, was succeeded by another period of still and solemn silence, which was broken at length by the Countess, who again resumed her communication in the following terms.—

“ During the contest with his assassins, my husband, though they seldom spoke, more than once
imagined

imagined he was not totally unacquainted with the voice of one of them, and mentioned this circumstance to Duprey as they proceeded on their way to Margaretta's cottage.

“ St. Hypolite's wounds were of too serious a nature to admit of any unavoidable delay in procuring assistance for them; his faithful attendant, therefore, restrained the instigations of curiosity till a fitter opportunity offered for their gratification, and flew for a surgeon in the neighbourhood, whom having dispatched after his master, he struck into the path they had recently trod, eager to make every possible discovery relative to the knowledge of those circumstances immediately connected with the bloody transaction, to ascertain one of the actors in which, was a case of no common concern.

“ By the aid of a lantern, Duprey reached the spot without much difficulty, where he was quickly joined by a person whom the surgeon accidentally encountered after their separation, and sent to his assistance.

“ One Russian alone remained; the other two, I have already said, had secured their retreat. Duprey and his companion approached the no longer formidable assailant, and raising the lantern to his now pallid, inanimate countenance, removed
the

the clotted hair, steeped in blood, which half concealed it. The discovery that succeeded, filled St. Hypolite's faithful valet with horror and astonishment—the features of De Verney stood revealed to view!! Duprey recoiled from the shocking conviction of this man's villany with a mingled sentiment of surprise and indignation. The person who accompanied him snatched the lantern from his trembling hand, and again held it to the breathless object before them. A mask lay upon his breast, which appeared to have dropped off during the last struggle of expiring nature. The pulse had ceased to vibrate, and the gloomy curtain of death seemed to have shrouded the closing scene of his earthly existence. Duprey and the stranger, judging the end of their enquiry fully answered, hastened forward to the cottage, to communicate the extent of their knowledge, without thinking it necessary to give themselves any further trouble on the occasion.

“ My husband, however, when able to speak, was of a different opinion, and suggested the possibility of finding some papers in the possession of the deceased, which might probably assist in leading to a discovery of his associates. Duprey and his companion, in consequence of this idea, again departed, and took the road to the forest.

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The latter, who was a woodcutter, proposed to follow a nearer direction, which would conduct them much sooner to the spot, and which he averred was well known to him. The shades of night, now far advanced, received an additional gloom from the thick foliage that surrounded them; and in spite of the lantern, and the guide's boasted acquaintance with every quarter of the forest, they somehow or other wandered out of their way, and had considerably passed the place they were in search of, when striking into a cross-path, which it was supposed would rectify the mistake, a hollow groan, apparently from some person in the vicinity, caught their attention. They stopped, and listened for a moment; a repetition of it was heard, by which they were guided to the spot from whence it came, and they instantly followed its direction. There they found a man seated on the ground, supporting himself against the root of an old tree. At first he appeared incapable of answering the questions immediately addressed to him, and in return only muttered something in a low, inarticulate voice, which they were unable to understand. Duprey held up the lantern to his face; it was pale, languid, and disfigured, but not so materially altered as to prevent him from speedily recognizing the features of De Verney's valet-de-chambre.

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“ St. Hypolite’s servant was a sensible, intelligent man; the horrid truth flashed upon his mind, and he quickly saw the propriety of affording every possible aid to the invalid, that so he might be enabled to develop the fatal mystery of this calamitous night.

“ After having, therefore, rendered him every assistance that circumstances would admit of, their patient found himself so far relieved as to attempt speaking more distinctly.

“ He had not been totally deprived of recollection, and soon perceived who was now his principal benefactor.

“ But though this discovery was painful, it produced more contrition than tokens of surprise, the motives for which he proceeded to explain as soon as his present strength appeared sufficient for the purpose.

“ The sum total of his confession amounted merely to this; that his master, irritated beyond bearance at my husband, for having prevented his recent views on Magdeleine de St. Cyprian, and more than half convinced, from the observations made at Narbonne, that he had likewise been the means of injuring him in that quarter, where he imagined himself rivalled in my favourable opinion, and otherwise disgraced by the supposed artful conduct

conduct of the Chevalier, (all which disappointments were become doubly galling from the critical situation of his finances, occasioned by some late very considerable losses at the gaming-table), he had, in consequence of these events, formed a resolution to strike a blow sufficiently decisive for the removal of so great an impediment to the success of his views; to the commission of which atrocious act he was powerfully instigated by the repeated advice and proffered assistance of his unprincipled companion, Marat.

“ St. Hypolite’s neutrality once secured, his master, he said, feared no other obstacle, while aided by the influence and fruitful invention of Madame de St. Cyprian. The destruction of the Chevalier was, therefore, to prove the groundwork of the Baron’s fortune; and as Marat’s was likewise deeply implicated in the success of this affair, it was looked upon as a matter of too much importance to entrust the execution of it with hireling strangers, by whose treachery or cowardice the scheme might be finally rendered abortive. It was therefore agreed, after much deliberation, to take the part of executioners on themselves, with the addition alone of the narrator, of whose fidelity they had already received too many censurable

surable proofs to doubt his compliance with an arrangement so big with beneficial consequences.

“ To accomplish this diabolical design in the least suspicious manner, their horrid plans were repeatedly revised, canvassed over, and the Chevalier's motions carefully observed. The person who carried my letter from the Lady Abbess, was discovered to come from the neighbourhood of Narbonne; the packet itself, however, no menace, no bribe, no entreaty could draw from his possession; a transient glimpse of its contents they had, nevertheless, contrived to obtain before the bearer perceived the absolute necessity of guarding it more strictly from the eager eye of enquiry. De Verney had a song he had formerly requested me to write out of a music-book; he examined it while the letter was yet fresh in his mind, and was convinced they were both the production of one hand.—Marat lay in wait to join him; and St. Hypolite was traced to the supposed residence of his child. This route, however, was so different from that leading to Narbonne, that their plans were at first a little disconcerted by it. The Chevalier, nevertheless, was afterwards discovered to take the very path they had mentally allotted him; and the person hitherto employed in watching his motions, immediately galloped off in a shorter direction,

direction, to inform his principals of this circumstance.

“ His employers had already stationed themselves on a part of the road from whence they could observe others without being liable to the notice of passengers; and near which their intended victim must necessarily travel, if his course lay in the line they suspected.

“ Their measures were too well taken to prove abortive; they continued to follow at a distance, till at length seeing him set off on foot, his servant absent, and the termination of his journey no longer doubtful, while the hour, aided by the darker shades of the forest, inspired an almost certainty of success, diabolical revenge goaded them on, and—you know the rest!!!

“ This man, not naturally bad, but corrupted by the example and precepts of his vile superiors, was, almost at the commencement of the conflict, seized with remorse at the atrocious extent of the intended crime, which its attempted perpetration shewed in stronger colours than when viewed at a greater distance. The wound he speedily received, added force to the reflections that rapidly presented themselves; and the moment it was practicably possible, he fled into the thickest part of the forest, with the design of procuring assistance for

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St. Hypolite, before some woodcutters, whom he had passed at a distance, retired from their daily labour.

“ It is true, the additional aid of his single arm, in the present state of affairs, would probably have been of infinite service to the Chevalier ; but he was already wounded, and if finally unsuccessful in the new adopted cause, the fate that awaited him was by no means enigmatical, for his master and Marat had both solemnly pledged themselves to dispatch him with their own hands, on the smallest symptom of what they called treachery ; and he knew they would not at least be backward to keep that oath, however little value they might set on similar ones in a better transaction.

“ Indeed Marat had already given him an instance of their future intentions in this way ; for perceiving, no doubt, his design, though too closely engaged with St. Hypolite at the time to prevent it, he fired a pistol after him, which took deeper effect than the former one, and by the great loss of blood it occasioned, rendered him unable to pursue his purposed application to the woodcutters.

“ Finding himself gradually growing fainter, self-preservation now became the principal object of his concern ; fearful of falling, therefore, into

the power of such bloodthirsty villains, he took shelter amongst some underwood, in hopes of lying concealed till they had taken flight; which he naturally concluded would be the case when they had accomplished the destruction of their intended victim.

“ In this situation he soon perceived Marat sculking past; he heard him groan, and with dreadful apprehension on his own account, observed him stop a few paces from where he lay. A ray of the moon, which had hitherto scarcely appeared through the foliage of the forest, at this moment made its way, and displayed his vicinity; it likewise afforded the trembling valet an opportunity of observing something of a glittering appearance which he held in his hand, and seemed to gaze upon with intense eagerness. In a few moments, however, he continued his flight, and the man saw no more of him.

“ From this information Duprey imagined it unnecessary to lose any further time in searching for the body of De Verney; and, assisted by his companion, immediately removed the poor fellow to the nearest village, where they promised to send the surgeon to dress his wounds, after which they returned to the cottage.

“ The remains of the infamous Baron were found

found on the following day, and conveyed to a house in the same village, where the deposition of the valet was taken upon oath before a magistrate; all which the good surgeon saw conducted in due form, but at the same time took precautions for preventing St. Hypolite's name from becoming a source of public investigation;—to accomplish which, the Lady Abbess was under the necessity of entrusting him with the principal incidents in my eventful life.—

“ As political transactions are generally of a more precarious nature than those usually encountered in the common course of human affairs, so likewise is the applause annexed to them vague, fleeting, and uncertain; its frail fabric is easily demolished by the smallest failure, however unforeseen or unavoidable; and to be unsuccessful is a synonymous term for criminality in the estimation of a misjudging public.

“ My father experienced the truth of this observation: though flattered by the most unbounded approbation in the early stages of the business with which he was entrusted at the Court of Vienna, an unexpected change of measures was productive of effects very different from those to which he had looked forward with such exultation and pleasure. The consequence was natural; he left the

Court in disgust, and returned to Narbonne dissatisfied, and nearly out of temper with the whole world. There he almost entirely secluded himself from the common intercourse of society; and in sullen, solitary discontent, brooded over the bitter cup of disappointed hopes, which continually presented itself to his view. The curtain was withdrawn from the dazzling scenes of delusive ambition, and his mind left at leisure to dwell on domestic calamities, which might not, perhaps, have intruded with such violence, had his favourite schemes of aggrandizement proved more consonant to the extent of his wishes, and the ideal importance assigned them.

“ In this situation, his thoughts naturally recurred to the loss sustained by the death of an only son, and probably with greater force in proportion to the little reflection hitherto bestowed on that melancholy event.

“ At a period such as this, the consolatory voice of a last remaining child might have proved of material consequence; but the daughter on whom the office of comforter should have fallen, was, alas! incapable of administering that to others of which she was so much in want herself! Deranged intellects, and a half-broken heart, were ill calculated for such an undertaking. Once, and but once,

once, my poor father requested to see me at the Convent. The state of mental inanity to which I was then reduced, made too deep an impression on his feelings to wish for a second interview; and while the sad recollection presented itself, he considered his sufferings at their climax, and himself the most miserable of humankind.

“ Unaccustomed to struggle with misfortunes of the description which had latterly overwhelmed him, the school of modern philosophy furnished very inadequate arguments for consolation to a mind that, like his, had not hitherto thought of drawing resources from the more sublime and soothing precepts of religion; and he soon had reason to be convinced that those principles, formerly adopted as the most enlightened rule of conduct, neither tranquillized the bosom when torn by distress, nor materially assisted in subduing the inordinate transports of passion, and a natural bad temper.

CHAP. VIII.

" Loud and more loud I make my nightly moan ;

" The swelling echoes learn like me to groan,

" The ghosts to scream as thro' the aisles they sweep,

" The shrines to shudder, and the saints to weep,"

SAVAGE.

" AT length some faint glimmerings of returning reason gave indications of approaching convalescence. Intelligence of this circumstance was the first thing that appeared to rouse my father from the gloomy train of ideas which had now so long hung heavy on his drooping spirits.

" Impatient to be convinced if I had really spoken as reported, he repaired to the Convent, and once more insisted upon being admitted to the place of my confinement.

" My best, my almost only friend, the Lady Abbess,

Abbess, remonstrated against a measure, apparently so replete with danger in the present enfeebled state of my intellects, and implored him to delay the purposed interview till my mental faculties acquired more strength to sustain it; assuring him at the same time, that as the disorder had evidently taken a favourable turn, she trusted I should recover daily, provided I was treated in a proper manner, and sufficient time allowed for the slow dawnings of reason to resume their former station. She enforced these arguments by adding that she could not pretend to answer for the consequences, if my spirits were to be subjected to any sudden surprise, or prematurely hurried.

“ She talked to the wind, however; her impatient auditor had no conception of a child suffering herself to be flurried by the presence of her parent; though, alas! that child had but too frequently experienced the possibility of such a circumstance. His mind had already in some degree returned to its natural bias, and he was again seized with the idea of making me subservient to the late dormant views of soaring ambition—that ruling passion, the hidden seeds of which had rather been transiently crushed by the rude hand of disappointment, than totally eradicated from their original soil.

“ Though the Lady Abbess knew that the laws

of the Medes and Persians were not more unchangeable than the determination of my father, she still persevered in her hopes of prevailing upon him to relinquish his design, till at length, unable otherwise to account for her reluctance to oblige him, he began to suspect some machinations were on foot, with the view of inducing me to take the veil, and endow the community with the fortune I possessed in my own right. Fraught with this ill-founded notion, which led him to suppose me infinitely better than was really the case, no argument, no entreaty, had longer any force to prevent the immediate execution of his design.

“Uncertain how I might be affected by such an event, and fearful, amidst the wild wanderings of a disordered imagination, that some unforeseen incident would occur, or some word be uttered, sufficient to rouse every latent spark of suspicion in the irritable mind of the Count, she at length followed his steps to my apartment, and waited the result in trembling solicitude.

“The intense stupor, and deep melancholy, which on his former visit had shook even the hitherto impenetrable heart of my father, were now gradually receding, and I was beginning to have a confused, indistinct idea of my miserable existence. I knew him not at first, however; but the

the heavy-raised eye, fixed on his face with a wild vacancy of expression, seemed to indicate a wish to that purport. The Lady Abbess therefore, anxious to prevent any bad consequences from overstraining the faculties of a weakened memory, judged it safest to assist my obvious endeavours at recollection, by pronouncing his name aloud, and begging he would speak to me.

“ The sound of his voice no sooner struck my ears than I gave a faint scream, and throwing my arms round one of the assistant Nuns, instantly swooned away.

“ My father, nevertheless, would not yet be prevailed upon to leave the room; he insisted on remaining to observe my recovery, and the effects that followed this fit, which he flattered himself was the forerunner of a convalescent state; because, though subject occasionally to such complaints all my life, this was the first I had taken since the fatal derangement of my senses became stationary, and of course it was considered as a favourable omen.

“ Reason, however, did not appear with returning recollection, or rather a strong, unconquerable degree of terror overwhelmed its yet feeble rays. Nothing could persuade me to look at the Count de Narbonne. I covered my face,

and persevered in avoiding his eyes; words, inarticulately pronounced, nevertheless burst from my parched lips, amongst which the name of my brother was alone distinguishable.

“ The Abbess, alarmed lest other subjects even of a more interesting description, floating on the surface of a distempered mind, might break forth, and mingle with the numberless incongruities I now uttered, once more exerted her utmost influence to prevail on my father to retire; and after no small difficulty, found her endeavours crowned with success. Happy in the idea (which she judged it convenient to encourage) of a fortunate change soon taking place in my situation, and convinced he had wronged her by his former suspicions of duplicity, he departed from the Convent in better spirits, and with gayer prospects than had presented themselves to his view for some months past.

“ The impression left on my imagination was of a very different nature; and the experiment made by my father in this visit had nearly been attended with the most fatal consequences. In him my perturbed fancy saw not the parent, but the stern, the despotic tyrant, alike the destroyer of my peace, and the unrelenting enemy of a murdered, but beloved husband's family. The faint

faint rays of recollection that feebly pierced through the dark, thick clouds which enveloped the folds of a burning brain, as the past recurred at intervals with all its horrors, wrought up the injured fabric to a height of frenzy hitherto unknown. The most violent paroxysms of anguish succeeded, till my exhausted frame, unable to struggle any longer with the exertions of insanity, at length yielded to the conflict, and a fever speedily ensued, from which it was for several weeks doubtful whether I should ever recover.

“ Youth, and the mistaken, though well-meant, attention of my more than mother, nevertheless prevailed, and I rose at last from the bed of sickness, weak and emaciated it is true, but restored to the use of my intellectual faculties, and all the lacerating pangs of remembered affliction.

“ With an aching heart I once more entered the Castle of Narbonne; for, alas! my father continued deaf to every reiterated entreaty for permission to remain at the Monastery.

“ What a melancholy abode was that spacious habitation now become to me! My groans reverberated through the solitary, unfrequented apartments as, weeping and forlorn, I wandered amongst them with feelings amounting to agony. In my brother's room I usually spent some part of every

returning day; the still and solemn hours of night were appropriated to the sad reflections which occurred, in that of the Chevalier. There, while free from the danger of intrusion or discovery, while repose sealed the eyes of others, and sorrow, if experienced, was profoundly buried in temporary oblivion, there have I sat ruminating on the chequered scenes of life, and the heart-rending vicissitudes of time and chance, till the matin-bell from the Convent fixed my attention on its Gothic towers, and the distant glimpse of the Nuns gliding to prayers beneath their ivy-crowned arches, warned me to retire from the risk of observation. Then softly stealing to my own chamber, fatigue, mental and corporeal, would sometimes overcome my heavy eyelids, and procure a temporal respite from the miseries of my waking dreams.

“ Indulgences, however, of this nature might again have proved fatal to the stability of my reasoning faculties, had not the bent of my thoughts about this juncture taken a strong religious bias. The school of adversity is a powerful inspirer of its tenets; and I had, alas! been too long a disciple of that severe instructor not to acknowledge the efficacy of its lessons.

“ Sensible of my predilection for the soothing precepts of the Gospel, and apprehensive of the influence

influence they might attain over a mind so weakened, so lately emancipated from the fetters of insanity, my father's former suspicions recurred, and the presence of the Lady Abbess was only to be obtained at the price of the most solemn engagement, by which both sides were reciprocally bound never to mention the subject of my taking the veil in any of our conversations.

“ Scarcely yet eighteen years of age, I had experienced the possession and deprivation of almost every blessing that the heart of sensibility rests upon with the most exquisite delight. I was already sick of the world, and would gladly have buried my faded cheek and bleeding bosom in the calm retirement of a cloister; but I was forced to resign even this favourite inclination, lest a worse thing should befall me,” and my future intercourse with the benevolent Lady Abbess, from whom I derived every remaining consolation, be henceforth prohibited.

“ To submit where despotism was armed with parental authority, where tyranny might crush, but resistance was nerveless, appeared my only resource against persecution and additional sorrow. My friend taught me the necessity of conforming to unavoidable circumstances, to the will of Providence, and the laws of filial duty. She inculcated,
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what daily experience impressed on my mind, that yielding to the first inclinations of the heart is often attended with dangerous consequences to our future peace, when unsanctioned by the certain approbation of those on whom we are naturally dependant; that every deviation from moral rectitude, or propriety of conduct, is finally its own punishment; and that whatever errors a parent may be guilty of committing, or whatever failures appear on his side, such ought not to furnish any plausible excuse for the plea of retaliation from his offending offspring. In short, this valuable woman brought me by degrees to bear calmly the inevitable evils humanity is liable to suffer; and her precepts were in good time, for no sooner did my father perceive that I struggled to obtain self-command and fortitude, than he quickly fell on means to put them both to a severe trial.

“ As the sudden and premature loss of my brother, to whom I was known to be tenderly attached, was still supposed to be the original cause of my late intellectual disorder, my father chose to imagine I should gradually conquer every remaining appearance of melancholy dejection, if my thoughts were once fairly turned to the subject on which his own had now dwelt for some time with unremitting solicitude.

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“ The favourite scheme to which he attached so much weight, was the accomplishment of a projected union between his heart-broken daughter and a collateral branch of the family; who, since the period of my brother's death, was considered as the future male representative of the House of Narbonne; and on whom, at my father's decease, a more considerable portion of his wealth must necessarily devolve, than he wished should be separated from his other possessions.

“ The result of this transaction, I understand, is already known to you. Though I was not sufficiently wicked to wish for my cousin's death, I certainly could not be said to regret the event when it happened; and I felt a peculiar degree of satisfaction in the reflection that I could still consider myself as the widow of St. Hypolite in every sense of the word.

“ But the victim of an ambitious superior has little to plume herself upon; her feelings are never taken into the question, and she is merely considered as a necessary instrument to the completion of her tyrant's views for his own gratification.

“ Eight months had not yet elapsed since the premature death of his nominal son-in-law, before the mind of my father again recurred to its predominant basis, and my hand was a second time destined

destined to be bartered for wealth we could not want, and rank to which I was indifferent.

“ The craving spirit of avarice increases with the food that nourishes it ; and inflated ambition, a stranger to moderation, is ever soaring on forward wing after some new pursuit, which, phoenix-like, raises its aspiring head from the successful termination of the last, and with renovated energy keeps the favourite object in view, however beyond its reach.

“ The Marquis de la Moreville had a large estate in the neighbourhood of Narbonne, which my father conceived would make a capital addition to his own possessions in that quarter, and therefore determined to obtain it at my expence.

“ This nobleman had a son the counterpart in most respects of De Verney, though in personal accomplishments, and plausibility of address, infinitely his inferior.

“ However strong must have been my repugnance to forming another matrimonial engagement, particularly with a character of this description, one objection scarcely less powerful still existed. The young Marquis had been one of the Baron's associates in every vice ; like him, the secret companion and dupe of the infamous Marat ; and like him, also bore immortal hatred to St. Hypolite's family, on account of a quarrel with the Chevalier's elder

elder brother, whom he accused of supplanting him in the affections of a lady to whom he paid his addresses.

“ The mere idea of any connection whatever with such a man made me shudder, and was repugnant to every feeling of humanity; my heart peremptorily revolted from an engagement so detestable, and, passive as I had in some measure hitherto appeared, I resolved to be so no longer.

“ Eager to accomplish the object in present view, this one was apparently of too much consequence not to require and obtain his utmost attention; and the matter had already been canvassed between my father and the old Marquis without the smallest suspicion of such a transaction having transpired in the neighbourhood. As for myself, I was to be kept in profound ignorance of the whole affair, till all the different arrangements were too far advanced to admit, according to my father's idea, of retraction.

“ Meanwhile the princely fortune to which I was now unhappily the undoubted successor, could not fail of becoming an object of importance in the estimation of the self-interested and avaricious. I had, consequently, numerous proposals; but, dead to the joys of the world, and deeply absorbed in melancholy recollections of the past, my heart
felt

felt alone wedded to the cold tomb that enclosed the mouldering remains of my murdered husband, over which I unceasingly poured the streaming tear of connubial affection, when I could possibly steal from the Castle with safety, and ease my agonized bosom by indulging in the sad luxury of unrestrained sorrow. Even the solitary and solemn hour of midnight had no terrors for me! My mind was now become familiar with horror! It is true, Margareta or her husband usually waited my arrival at the Castle gates, and accompanied me to and from this place; there the service required of them terminated. Alone, and weeping, I wandered along the gloomy aisles, nor shrunk from the hollow sound of my own steps, or the terrific shadows portrayed around, as the lantern I carried partially glared on the monumental receptacles of the silent dead.

“ In such a frame of mind, it is almost unnecessary to add that my rejections were uniform, and given in terms so peremptory, as finally to do away every chance of a future alteration of sentiment taking place on matrimonial subjects.

“ My father’s passive forbearance on these occasions filled me with astonishment; I was totally at a loss to account for a circumstance so extraordinary; nor could I comprehend from whence proceeded

proceeded the change in his conduct which I daily experienced. Agreeably surpris'd with an alteration so little expected, I endeavoured to secure a continuation of it, and consequently exerted every effort to please, by paying the utmost attention to his wishes. But amidst this delusive calm a storm was gathering, which burst forth with greater violence from the mutual deception under which we both laboured: he in supposing I would conform without reluctance to the strict letter of his will—I in falsely imagining his temper had undergone an amendment, and that his mind, softened by recent affliction and disappointment, would refrain from urging a compliance with any thing that appeared repugnant to my happiness or inclination.

“ Alas! I might have known the disposition of him I had to deal with better, than thus to have subjected myself to the painful trials that followed a fatal and ill-judged security.

“ At length, when time had matured the negotiation, and the schemes of our respective parents were ripe for execution, mine took the trouble of disclosing his views, and pretty plainly hinted at the ready acquiescence expected to them. This information came upon me like a thunderbolt, and

and I instantly rejected the proposition without the smallest hesitation.

“ My father, however, was not formed of materials to let himself be baffled in his plans by the obstinate folly of a silly girl. The homogeneous traits of his character once more became visible; calmness, moderation, and every late semblance of natural affection were thrown aside from the moment they ceased to be useful; and I was sternly commanded to receive the son of his friend as my future husband, or to take the consequence of my disobedience. Death itself would have proved ten thousand times more preferable. I scrupled not to say so. I was ordered out of his sight, and willingly retired to my own apartment, from whence in the evening I was again summoned below stairs. Averse to aggravate matters by a refusal, I complied, and with downcast eyes entered the sitting room, over which the shades of twilight threw a sombre tint of melancholy, in perfect unison with my feelings.

“ A stranger approached at the door, and led me to a seat. It was the young Marquis. Hitherto there had been little intercourse between the two families, and I had not seen him for some years prior to the present transaction. The freedom of his address, therefore, displeased me.

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There was an air of insolent security and self-importance in his manner and whole appearance, so totally different from what I had been accustomed to see in St. Hypolite's conduct, that the sad contrast co-operating with surprise, and the scene I had already gone through with my father on his account, struck upon my heart with a sensation I could not repress;—but the indignation with which I snatched my hand from his hold, speedily giving way, I foolishly burst into tears, and was rising to quit the apartment, when my hand was again roughly seized, and I found myself reseated in the chair I had just left. Removing my handkerchief to discover the cause of a treatment so unceremonious, my eyes met those of the old Count, with rage and ill-suppressed resentment trembling on every agitated feature.

“ A momentary recollection, however, for once in his life immediately whispered the necessity of self-command, and prudently supplied a sufficient quantity of assumed composure to give an artful turn to my behaviour, by insinuating that my health, weakened and affected by the loss of my brother, was frequently subject to similar appearances, which an imbecile indulgence of sorrow had nearly rendered habitual.

“ My tears, nevertheless, continued to flow;
and

and he now became as anxious for my absence as the first movement had been to retain me; I was, therefore, permitted to retire, and a glance of his eye accompanied the permission that made me tremble as I rose a second time to depart.

“ I waited not for a repetition of this indulgence, but hurried from their presence as a criminal from the face of his judge, and hastily locking the door of my chamber, yielded to the anguish that oppressed me, and allowed my tears to stream in uninterrupted anguish.

“ This melancholy employment, however, was at length disturbed by a message from my father, desiring to know when he and the Marquis might once more expect to see me again. I started at the name of the latter, pleaded indisposition for non-appearance, and entreated the Count's excuse for not being able to attend his summons. Soon after I heard the Marquis drive from the door, and doubted not but the half-suppressed tempest of parental rage would quickly overwhelm me with renovated violence. I was not mistaken. It burst on my head with unusual fury, and the scene concluded with the most solemn oath that I should be the property of the young Marquis, *by one means or other*, before another fortnight elapsed.

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“ My father’s wishes led him ardently to desire a male heir in his own family to the House of Narbonne; and to attain this favourite object, conjointly with an additional increase of wealth, was considered, in the scale of human advantages, materially necessary to the future peace of his declining years. Alas! but for his own unfortunate temper, that gratification had been probably secured to him, and my once smiling cherub, with his ever lamented parent, yet in existence!—Oh my father!” exclaimed the Countess, raising her clasped hands and eyes energetically to heaven, “ Oh my father! is it to you I must ascribe the past and present sufferings of my miserable life? Ah me! the fact is but too well ascertained! too deeply felt through every recollected trace of horror! The stroke of Heaven I can bear, but injuries from man are not so easily supported!”

After a pause Madame de Narbonne resumed her discourse.

“ In spite of my persevering opposition to the completion of his views, the Count continued to make the requisite arrangements with as much facility as if my sentiments had been congenial with his own on the subject.

“ But parents, more than children, are not masters of futurity. The old Marquis, who was
naturally

naturally suspicious, imagined he had reason to suppose the domain of Narbonne was of greater extent and value than my father, from self-interested motives, had represented it; and, as the projected union was merely a matter of bargain and sale with them both, he insisted upon an addition to the settlements, which would have made a considerable alteration in favour of his son to my disadvantage.

“ My father, already in an ill-humour, objected to this proposal, and haughtily demanded if the honour of the Count de Narbonne was a subject of questionable import? The other, disliking his air and manner, gave an irritating reply, obliquely insinuating a proud consciousness of superior rank, which, however valuable in his eyes at other times, the Count did not feel at present disposed to value at a very high rate. A warm altercation ensued, and they parted mutually dissatisfied with each other. My father, unwilling to criminate himself, yet unable to restrain the violence of disappointed expectations to his own breast, vented his anger on the only person within his reach, who, from necessity and situation, was obliged to bear it. I was reproached as the cause from whence the whole disagreement had originated, and accused of conveying anonymous information to the
Marquis

Marquis de Moreville, that the very circumstance might happen which had in fact taken place !

“ This was a charge to which I certainly could not, with truth, plead guilty ; but to attempt a vindication against prejudices so strong, so immovable as those I had to contend with, would have been an Herculean labour, only fit for an inhabitant of Utopia to undertake. I therefore let the tempest rave without endeavouring to interrupt its fury ; but forbearance did not avail me ; my very silence was liable, it appeared, to misinterpretation, and was said to imply a conviction of error. I adopted another line of conduct, and tried to exculpate myself from the degrading imputation of an informer. I even ventured to remonstrate on the palpable cruelty and injustice of a charge so unmerited ; but it did not signify—I was pre-ordained to suffer : and my poor father at length wrought himself up to such a climax of ungovernable passion, that, in consequence of the mental agitation he had recently undergone, the usual symptoms of his old disorder took place, accompanied by appearances of the most unfavourable and alarming nature.

“ The speedy progress of the complaint soon set medical skill and assistance at defiance. My unremitting attention, my tears, my prayers for his recovery were ineffectual. In the short period

of a few weeks he was removed from the bed of a spacious and magnificent apartment, from the gates of a Castle where his will had been paramount to law, and the glance of his eye dispensed joy or terror—removed too for ever to the dark, dreary, and limited confines of a solitary family vault, where a long line of illustrious ancestors silently reposed, unagitated by the passions of avarice or ambition—where human hopes, fears, and expectations no longer roused the mind to action, no longer had power to inspire the once cherished sensation of pleasure in the bosom of smiling prosperity, or was able to inflict the pang of disappointment on the trembling victim of misfortune and misery!

“Heaven is my witness,” continued the Countess, “how much my resistance to his will cost me! I even reproached myself at times with being eventually the cause of his death, and was frequently under the necessity of recalling to remembrance those darker shades in his character from whence my sufferings had originally sprung, as bracers of the mind against the attacks of sensibility, and the weakness of a heart depressed by a succession of unmerited afflictions. Alas! though my happiness had never been considered as a comparative matter of consequence, his was ever dear to me;

me; and to have secured its attainment I would willingly have made any possible sacrifice. The truth of this assertion had already been proved by the obedience paid to his will in the engagement formed with my cousin; but again to prostitute my hand—and to whom too? the sworn enemy of St. Hypolite, the vicious associate of Marat!—Impossible! it could not be!—I understand that expressive look, Charlotte; it seems to say I have not always adhered to that resolution; but suspend your judgment, and you will find the past incidents of my life at least equalled, if not surpassed, by those yet to be related, in deeds of horror and misfortune.

CHAP. IX.

“ Soft and sweet

“ As looks of charity, or voice of lambs

“ That bleat upon the morning, are the words

“ Of Christian meekness.”

BROOKE.

“ TIME, and reflection on the necessity of resignation to the will of Providence, gradually, in some measure, assimilated my feelings to the circumstances of that situation in which I now found myself placed—a single individual, indeed, in the scale of human beings, but at length a free agent also, uncontrouled by the hand of despotism or caprice, sole mistress of my own actions, and largely gifted with the means of rendering the wretched and needy essential service. Was I nevertheless an object of envy to others, or even justly

justly sensible of the many sources of gratification now so abundantly in my possession? Ah no! mine were long merely considered as negative blessings; emancipation from restraints under which I had hitherto laboured, rather than any intuitive consciousness of actual enjoyment. He who alone could have gilded ever scene with the golden ray of happiness, and made a splendid independence valuable, was no longer permitted to participate in my pleasures, or able to alleviate the pang of disappointment!—My child too, that princely inheritance which, in the course of nature, ought one day to have acknowledged him as its master! O my father! why, ah why, are you ever to be recalled to remembrance under circumstances so cruelly inauspicious—so deadly to every sensation of filial affection? Perhaps, my dear Charlotte, you think me too fastidious, and with the English poet * are ready to exclaim

“ We are too delicate;

“ And when we grasp the happiness we wish’d,

“ We call on thought to argue it away;”

and, like him, also may add, that

“ Some have too much wisdom to be happy.”

* Young.

But, alas! we must not measure the feelings of others by our own sentiments on their sufferings, unless we have ourselves experienced the very same individual degree of affliction under which they groan.—But pardon this digression.

“ Some time prior to the death of my father, the Count de St. Cyprian had likewise paid the debt of nature; he did not long survive the fate of his son, though unacquainted to the last with the particular circumstances attending that fatal event. Through the medium of St. Hypolite’s faithful servant, Duprey, (to whom, on a certain occasion, I had been fortunate enough to render an essential piece of service), a correspondence was commenced with Mademoiselle de St. Cyprian, soon after the lamented loss of her brother, from whence I derived no small degree of consolation. At a subsequent season, when I became my own mistress, the secret ties of infant amity, afterwards strengthened by personal intercourse, speedily matured into sentiments of the warmest and most permanent friendship. We were seldom asunder; she spent the greatest part of her time at Narbonne; and while the tear of corroding sorrow was poured in her gentle bosom, the balm of soothing pity proceeded from lips whose heart glowed with the purest sisterly affection that ever thrilled through the

the human breast. Her vile stepmother lived to form another matrimonial engagement; but, less fortunate than formerly, she soon met with her punishment in her choice, and suffered, from the diabolical disposition of her new husband, every mortification she had once endeavoured to inflict on others.

“ Three years rolled away, if not in perfect happiness, at least free from any additional subject for sorrow; we walked, worked, read, and wept over the tomb of St. Hypolite, when melancholy sensations became too powerful to be hushed by the voice of reason! At liberty to vent the grief that formerly wrung my heart with double violence, from the restraint under which I laboured, it now by degrees subsided into a calm, pensive, settled dejection, that seemed to form a part of my nature; indeed the sentiment which gradually took possession of my mind (I may say absorbed its every feeling), was such as to keep a permanent station amidst all the vicissitudes of life I have latterly undergone, and can only desert this desolated bosom with the last spark of earthly existence.

“ Magdeleine’s conduct during this period was such as evinced a superior understanding, and a just knowledge of the human heart.

She attempted not to reason away feelings implanted there by the hand of Nature, nor even introduced one single apothegm from the cold-blooded school of modern philosophy. "To rejoice with those that rejoice, and mourn with the mourner," was the mode of consolation this judicious friend at first invariably pursued; and if I may be allowed to judge of its intrinsic value by the subsequent effect, a more efficacious system could not easily have been adopted: in my own case at least I may venture to say so; since grief, deep and dreadful like the early poignancy of mine, yielded to the influence of its ameliorating power, and gradually softened into that sort of still, quiet dejection I have already described, which, upon the whole, is not an unpleasant sensation, when the mind has previously been wounded by irremediable misfortune, or corroding disappointment.

"Thus, by delicate attention and good sense, my mental physician once more restored me to some partial enjoyment of the blessings yet within my reach, at the very moment she endeavoured to turn my thoughts imperceptibly from those forever removed beyond it. Thus was I beguiled of selfish considerations, my hitherto gloomy ideas directed to objects of real utility, and my mind
insensibly

insensibly carried from solitary meditations on individual sorrow, to projects for the general benefit of the unhappy.

“About the end of the third year, a young gentleman, possessed of more merit than fortune, whose amiable qualifications and unshaken constancy had long obtained a principal station in Magdeleine’s bosom, returned from abroad, and soon became master of her hand. His situation in life required a residence in the capital, and the deprivation this occasioned me was not felt without a pang; but conceiving her happiness deeply implicated in the completion of an union with one so deservedly dear to her, I forbore to express the regret I could not divest myself of, and submitted to the necessity of a separation which almost tore open wounds scarcely more than half closed.

“In spite of the heroism I assumed on the trying occasion, Magdeleine was too well acquainted with the characteristic traits of my disposition not to know the price this ostensible fortitude cost me; and with a generosity all her own, solemnly vowed to pass some part of every year at Narbonne—a promise M. de Mercour was forced to ratify before he could obtain her hand, and which

was faithfully performed while a possibility remained of its accomplishment.

“ During these periodical visits, we perfected a plan, of which, to steal my thoughts from their melancholy tendency, Magdeleine had formerly laid the foundation. This was the formation of some charitable institutions for the education of youth, and the comfort of the aged and needy. M. de Mercour was here a very useful assistant and able counsellor, beneath whose auspices the whole was judiciously arranged, and the management of the different branches rendered easy in future.

“ Another source of occupation, and one that particularly interested my mind, was the beautifying and improving the Rock of Narbonne; this spot, so dear to recollections of pleasure, so pregnant with ideas of heart-rending anguish, where the happiest and most painful moments of existence had alike claimed a place, and which was still a solitary witness to the luxury of unrestrained affliction!

“ To effect this design, no expence, no trouble were considered as any impediment; the task seemed a debt due to the memory of times past, and I felt as discharging a duty to the ashes of my husband when thus employed. Assiduity, and the command of money, in process of time, overcame those difficulties

difficulties occasioned by a necessary attention to the important circumstance of secrecy and concealment annexed to the nature of the place; and I had at last the melancholy satisfaction of seeing it brought nearly to its present situation.

“ Since the commencement of this fatal Revolution, I made several additional improvements to some particular apartments, in the idea that the Rock of Narbonne might once more afford a shelter to the persecuted victims of a sanguinary, a misnamed reformation! and I have reason to congratulate myself on my foresight.”

“ But Magdeleine!” interrupted Charlotte. “ You do not mention, my dear Madam, what is become of the interesting Magdeleine;—where, pray, is now her place of residence? My heart already claims acquaintance with this truly amiable woman.”

“ Ah!” replied the Countess, with a deep sigh, “ where, indeed, is now her place of residence, or who can solve the impenetrable mystery of her fate? Early in life, destined, like myself, to be a widow, she returned from an excursion to Germany, whither her husband’s affairs demanded a personal attendance. The troubles had already begun at Paris, but business of importance nevertheless required her presence in that unhappy city;

and there I have reason to suppose her existence was prematurely terminated in this world! But of this more hereafter.

“ Her sister, who had formerly taken the veil, on the dissolution of the Convent to which she belonged, retired, at my request, to the one so frequently mentioned in the course of my narrative; where her late associates were speedily forgotten under the protection of the kind and friendly Lady Abbess. She possessed a mild, inoffensive disposition, suitable to her style of life; but in other respects by no means equal to Madame de Mercour, either for firmness of character or good sense: in the grave, however, these deficiencies are not found, and there she now rests in peaceful oblivion.

“ I had now nearly excluded every object from remembrance beyond the precincts of Narbonne; and in fact, Magdeleine excepted, what was there elsewhere remaining to interest me? The selfish and ambitious, it is true, at first judged me a subject worthy of some attention, but it depended entirely on myself to repress their presumption; and the means used for that purpose were too unequivocal to admit of misinterpretation. After a few ineffectual attempts at intrusion, I was, therefore, left to my own pursuits, and apparently forgotten
by

by that world which had no longer a place itself in my memory.

“ A recluse both from principle and choice, unfettered by any controuling hand to oppose the bent of inclination, and unconnected with any human being who could even distantly pretend to it, I fondly imagined I should henceforth be exempted from trouble, and at liberty to close the evening of an eventful life in comparative tranquillity. But Providence was of a different opinion, and no doubt knew what was fittest for the work of its own creation. Afflictions, accumulated afflictions overwhelm me, and eternal sufferings seem to have been my predestined portion on earth ! nevertheless I bow in submissive resignation to decrees certainly proper, otherwise they had not existed ; but as certainly of too mysterious a nature for the limited abilities of human wisdom to develop.

“ What remains to be related is, perhaps, in one sense harder to bear than the past, on account of the attendant humiliating circumstances connected with it. But when I consider that degradation of character cannot be fixed upon us merely by the vague opinion of a misjudging multitude, while secretly conscious that our own moral conduct is irreproachable, by the rectitude or errors of which

we can only be truly disgraced or exalted ; I feel myself rise above the horrors of my fate, and gratefully bless the supporting hand of that superior Director of the universe who, while it has granted me sufficient fortitude to sustain my allotted burthen with becoming dignity, deigns at the same time to shorten the term of my unfortunate pilgrimage, which I flatter myself is at length hastening to a happy conclusion.

“ But it is now time to return to the Castle ; I hear the signal of our conductor, and know by that the evening is far advanced.”

The Countess and her companion arose as she spoke, and winding along the hollow sounding aisle, found the husband of Margareta waiting their arrival at the porch ; who having attended them to the gates of the Castle, and seen them enter the first court in safety, immediately retired from his station, to the comforts of repose in his own little peaceful cottage.

CHAP. X.

“ What do these worthies

“ But rob and spoil, burn, slaughter, and enslave

“ Peaceable nations, neighbouring or remote?

“ Then swell with pride, and must be titled Gods,

“ Great benefactors of mankind, deliverers—

“ Worshipp'd as such !”

MILTON.

“ I AM almost tempted,” said Mr. Hastings, addressing the ladies as they entered the saloon, where he had waited their arrival some time, “ I am almost tempted to suspect there is something of late more than usually fascinating in moonlight rambles, else why are we thus perpetually deprived of your company, and left to the dull, everlasting discussion of politics with orators either well or ill qualified for the subject, as it may happen, but all equally

equally eager to mount the rostrum, and hold forth in the true English style of declamation? For my part, I am completely weary of such topics; and if sending them to the devil, *de tout mon cœur*, would have removed the nuisance, there they must irremediably have been paying their respects long before this time."

Charlotte was raising her eyes to interrupt any farther enquiries, when she perceived the varying colour of Madame de Narbonne's complexion, and saw her looks fixed in a listening posture on the opposite door of the sitting-room.

Apprehensive that De la Ville might have arrived during their last visit to the rock, she felt her spirits sink at the idea; and a powerful sentiment of pity filled her mind in behalf of the unhappy Countess, who had by this time advanced a few steps nearer the apartment, and stood close to a large, magnificent lamp that hung over the entrance, by which means the expression of her features became more obvious, and Mademoiselle de Cordet now imagined they exhibited stronger traces of surprise and tender sorrow, than terror or repugnance. While these remarks were passing in her mind, Hastings likewise approached the lamp, and was looking over a parcel of letters which he held in his hand, when the sound of a voice issuing
from

from the interior of the room caught her attention, and the figure of a person, not wholly unknown to her, passed by the door, which stood a little ajar. He was arm in arm with another gentleman, and seemed engaged in close conversation as they traversed the chamber together.

"This letter belongs to you, Mademoiselle," said Hastings, presenting one to Charlotte from the packet he had been examining; "I should almost have suspected it came from a certain friend of mine, had he not been the bearer of it himself. But, let me see—aye, even so!" continued he, placing himself in a ludicrous attitude of admiration; "such are the powerful effects of sympathy!"

"I know not to what you allude, Monsieur," replied Charlotte, viewing him with an inquisitive air of surprise; "pray have the goodness to explain your meaning?"

"Oh, you cannot possibly guess, I dare say, that this same allusion of mine points to your old friend, the Chevalier Montague!" cried Hastings, gaily; "no sympathetic feeling led you to the threshold of that room just now!—But, Heavens! what is the matter with Madame? See, she is sinking from the pillar against which she leant!"

The Countess heaved a deep sigh as her head
rested

rested on Charlotte's shoulder, who caught her in her arms before she reached the floor, and pointing to the door of the saloon that led to her own apartments, requested, in accents almost unintelligible, to be immediately conveyed thither. Her wish was speedily complied with, and her maid being summoned, Mr. Hastings retired, leaving directions to be informed of her situation as soon as possible.

Though the Countess did not entirely faint away at this juncture, a sensation yet more oppressive weighed heavy on her heart, and she enquired for the smelling bottle with which Charlotte had supplied her below stairs. The latter, upon missing it, recollected it had been thrown upon a window-seat in the saloon when assisting Madame across the floor of that extensive apartment; and she instantly flew down to procure it. Turning to ascend the staircase again, the door of the drawing-room was suddenly opened; several voices were once more heard; a tall and elegant figure appeared, whose face, however, she could not distinguish. He advanced with a quick step to the other side of the saloon; a beautiful portrait of Madame de Narbonne hung between two Grecian lamps; his eye rested upon it, and he stood immoveably fixed to the spot. Charlotte's situation became

became distressing; she wished not to encounter a stranger, and she ardently wished likewise to reach Madame's apartment: these two inclinations were unfortunately incompatible with each other on the present occasion, for her only means of attaining the latter object, lay exactly by the very identical place where the admirer of the picture had taken his station.

Impatient to be gone, and provoked at a detention so unexpected at this critical period, she determined to steal along, and while his attention was thus pre-occupied, rather risk the chance of discovery, than remain any longer under so inconvenient a degree of restraint. The sound of her steps, cautiously as she moved, did not escape notice; the stranger, starting from his reverie, looked round. A female form appeared at some distance gliding behind the pillars; her veil, partially thrown back, half concealed her face; but the total removal of that impediment to observation would have been of little consequence, since the sombre gloom that enveloped her path in the deep recesses of the vaulted passage, prevented the smallest probability of any discovery, even had her unconscious tormenter felt an inclination to attempt it. No such curiosity, however, actuated him; irresolute, it is true, he appeared, but not curious,

curious, though a moment's recollection apparently dispelled the former; for no sooner was her unwillingness to approach fully ascertained, than a deep sigh issued from his bosom, after which gracefully bowing, as if to remove her groundless apprehensions, he cast one more glance on the portrait, and instantly retired.

Charlotte witnessed his long wished-for departure with pleasure, and immediately rushing forward, found herself speedily at the side of the Countess.

That lady was still reclining on the sofa to which she had been conducted on her first entrance, and where her maid yet continued to support her languid frame.

"I have been most unavoidably detained," said Charlotte, approaching her with haste.

"Good Heavens!" cried the Countess, suddenly raising her head, and speaking in a low but wild and hurried accent, "have you then seen him likewise? Has his voice too vibrated on your ear? Ah, say not, no!—destroy not the pleasing illusion! few and fleeting have been my hours of terrestrial happiness, and invariably have they vanished almost in the moment of transient possession!—A dream of ideal bliss, a tale that is told, have been my enjoyments in this world; and even
now,

now, when the grave has for ever swallowed them from view, the wild fancies of a disordered imagination still embody their lifeless forms before me; for such, no doubt, will prove the termination of my present solicitude! Charlotte, my dear Charlotte, why do you not answer me?—Oh speak, I conjure you!”

Thus solemnly adjured, Mademoiselle de Cordet scarcely knew what to answer; she at length concluded, however, that the unconnected sentences uttered by the Countess, were merely the effects of an indisposition brought on by recitals which had harassed her mind, and recollections fatal to a still bleeding memory. Under this impression she proceeded to rule her conduct accordingly, though not without secretly reproaching herself for the blamable degree of curiosity recently evinced, by permitting it to be gratified at the expence of another's health and tranquillity.

Madame de Narbonne, however, quickly undeceived her in this idea; and she found with infinite regret that the former prepossession of a discovered resemblance to St. Hypolite in the voice and air of a person transiently seen in the drawing-room, had again recurred, and been the original cause of her present indisposition.

This solution of her hitherto mysterious exclamations

exclamations did not much contribute to relieve Charlotte's increasing solicitude on the occasion; she therefore paused for a moment to consider on her next mode of procedure; and in that moment a sudden reflection presented itself to view. On their entrance from the first court a servant had mentioned the arrival of strangers. St. Julian must have been one of the number: nay more, it was undoubtedly him whom the Countess accidentally recognized through the small opening of the sitting-room door—him too who had retarded her own progress in the saloon—yes, she now recollected his air and figure perfectly. Nothing but repugnance to encounter a supposed stranger at a period of so much anxiety, produced by the agitation of her mind on Madame's account, could possibly have concealed him from her knowledge. Her measures were of course taken immediately.

“Hasten, my good girl,” said she to the attendant; “fly to Mr. Hastings, and request him to meet me at the end of the gallery instantly!”

The young woman to whom she addressed herself, was sensible and prudent; she had been placed about the Countess by Margareta, to whom she happened to be nearly related, and already stood high in her Lady's favour, who, since the disagreeable termination of Jacqueline's masquerading adventure,

adventure, gave a decided preference to her personal services.

Mr. Hastings, apprehensive that Madame de Narbonne was worse, asked a thousand questions in a breath, as he followed the messenger, who modestly declined entering into particulars, further than assuring him his fears on the Countess's account were happily groundless, and referred him to Mademoiselle de Cordet for any other intelligence he might wish to obtain on the subject.

When Agathe returned, Charlotte flew to the appointed place of rendezvous, and after answering similar inquiries with those Mr. Hastings had already put to the former, requested to know if any of M. Charette's Officers were then in the Castle.

"Certainly one of them was here," replied Hastings.

"St. Julian, do you mean?" asked she, eagerly.

"The same," replied her informer.

"Heavens! where is he then? Lead me to him this moment!"

Hastings possessed a peculiar vein of humour; and whether from the intelligence contained in the packet of letters recently mentioned, from performing the honours of the Castle to the strangers, or whatever other cause, his spirits seemed unusually elevated this evening.

Astonished

Astonished at the visible solicitude of her manner, he regarded her for a few seconds in silence. At length—"Ah, poor Montague!" accompanied by a sly look, burst from his lips. "But stop, fair lady," for she was advancing to the top of the staircase, "your champion, though, in faith, a fine fellow, a wondrous fine fellow, does not appear to merit all this anxiety, otherwise he would not have departed without paying his *devoirs en passant* at the shrine of his idolatry."

"Departed!!" repeated Charlotte, in a voice of evident disappointment.

"Even so," returned the other; "but if you chuse it, my friend Montague shall endeavour to recal him."

"Mr. Hastings," resumed Charlotte, with a look of chagrin, "I am seriously interested in this enquiry, and wish not to hear it treated lightly."

"I really begin to believe that is the case," replied her persevering teaser, "and am sorry to perceive the impression appears to be deeper than at first I ventured to imagine it."

"Good God! Sir, why will you thus persist in misunderstanding me?" exclaimed Charlotte, in an accent of impatient vexation; "you cannot, surely,

surely, suppose I am solicitous for this information merely on my own account?"

"It is possible," said he, bowing ludicrously, "such a supposition may be indulged without incurring the imputation of unbounded credulity."

"You believe it then probable?"

"I believe—I reject nothing; this is the age of mental latitude. It is sufficient for me if Montague is orthodox on the subject; I am too old to become the confidential depositary of a young lady's secrets."

"Oh, the provoking, incomprehensible nature of an English disposition!" cried his tormented auditor. "Sons of caprice! weathercocks veering alternately round with every alteration in their own changeable climate! Gay or sullen according as the existing degree of sunshine affects them, and yet presuming to accuse our nation of instability, and inconsistency of character! Is it not practicable to obtain a rational answer to a plain question? or must I depart without it, and ascribe your perverseness to the influence of British philosophy, with which foreigners are pleased to compliment your countrymen so copiously?"

"Upon my word, a tolerable philippic against these said unfortunate countrymen of mine; but

as the present company are always excepted on such occasions, I plead privilege immemorial, and of course can have no share in it."

"This is miserable trifling, Mr. Hastings; let me ask you again—can you be serious for a few minutes, or not? Surely something very extraordinary has happened to inspire you with so unusual a flow of spirits."

"Yes, something has happened, I confess, to produce that effect; *partial* evil is said to be *universal* good; in that light I consider the event that has just taken place, and rejoice accordingly."

"Is the circumstance to which you allude of national consequence or public import?" asked Charlotte, in expectation of hearing something that might lead to her own business.

"If relieving the country from a parcel of plundering, bloodthirsty villains, who disgrace it, comes under that description, it undoubtedly is so. Several hundreds of rascally Republicans have just been sent on an embassy to the devil. Charette has cured them of deifying knaves, worshipping prostitution in their polluted temples of Reason, and decapitating virtuous rulers, whether Kings or magistrates."

"Had you this intelligence from St. Julian?"

"He confirmed it," replied Hastings; "but
the

the packet I received, conveyed the first communication of the victory;—a messenger was dispatched with it from Paris; he was overtaken, and plundered on the road by some worthies of reforming notoriety. St Julian, with a small handful of men, came upon them just as they were retreating with their booty, retook the spoils, knocked the promulgators of the new order of things on the head, and seeing a packet addressed to Narbonne, forwarded it by a trusty messenger, whose steps he quickly followed to ascertain its safe delivery.”

“ And where is he now, pray?”

“ Gone! that is all I know of the matter. His visit was a very short one; he enquired after the Countess and yourself, and understanding you were not in the Castle, soon after departed, to conduct the small corps he commanded to their appointed station.—Upon my faith, I repeat it, he is a very noble fellow! While his men halted near the outer court till he joined them, you cannot conceive what eulogiums were passed on his character, or in what high terms they celebrated the numerous virtues he possessed. My servant mentioned him almost as a superior being, when repeating their conversation to me afterwards.”

“ So this is the extent of your knowledge, I presume?”

“ The extent ! why, what the devil would you have more ? Sure it is enough to furnish materials for one evening’s gossip at least ;—but what says your own epistle on the subject ?”

“ Heavens !” cried Charlotte, “ I put it in my pocket when the Countess was first taken ill, and there it remains till this moment.—Adieu ! I go to peruse it.”

This letter was from her friend, Madame Duval, at Paris, and contained a very frightful description of the anarchy which prevailed, and the atrocities that were committed in the metropolis ; but pre-eminently wicked above the rest, appeared the sanguinary proceedings of the bloody Robespierre and the no less infamous Marat. These two disgraces to human nature were perpetually sounding the tocsin to devastation and murder, while temples were erected to every thing but their Creator and religion, with all the moral virtues outraged by the most impious ceremonies, and the actual practice of every vice under the face of Heaven ! To illustrate this melancholy fact, the writer gave a long detail of a late festival, instituted in honour of the Goddess of Reason, personified in the form of a common prostitute, whose beauty

was

was her only recommendation. She related the abominable orgies which were performed at her shrine, in proper terms of reprobation; giving at the same time numberless anecdotes of existing horrors, and describing her apprehensions of those in reserve, which were rendered but too probable by the circumstance of Marat's being permitted to publish his inflammatory papers, the intention of which was evidently to excite new massacres.

At the recurrence of Marat's detestable name, Charlotte involuntarily shuddered, and glancing her eye slightly over the remainder of the epistle, threw it by for the present. She found herself disappointed in the principal cause for its immediate perusal, and perceived it contained nothing analogous to the subject which particularly interested her feelings at this moment, *viz.* the situation of Madame de Narbonne's affairs. In the conduct of these affairs she felt herself utterly at a loss how to proceed; and returned to that lady's apartment, literally "puzzled in mazes, and perplexed in error," without having come to any resolution respecting them.

In the interval of her absence the Countess had retired to bed, leaving orders for Charlotte's admittance if she came to the door again. Agathe acquainted her with this arrangement, accompanied

by the additional intelligence, that Madame appeared to be then asleep—a circumstance that immediately determined her to retreat. “The night was now at odds with morning;” she hurried to her own chamber, just as the second watch was changing on the terrace below, and endeavoured to bury her anxiety in the oblivion of repose; but it would not do: “tired Nature’s sweet restorer, balmy sleep,” was nearly scared from her eyelids by intrusive reflection; or if weighed down for a few minutes by mental fatigue, and untimely hours, some fearful image of horror instantly dissolved the spell, or rather destroyed its efficacy, by embodying the hated form of Marat in all the different quarters of the globe, and witnessing his diabolical exultations over the dying agonies of those unfortunate victims, whom tormenting imagination represented writhing in tortures, till now unknown, under the barbarous hand of that ruthless and inhuman monster.

“No,” cried she, starting up, “this is too much to support any longer! If ideal evils are so hard to be borne, let me rather encounter realities;” and slipping on a wrapping gown, she immediately sprung from her bed.

The sun had by this time risen above the eastern turret of the Convent, and reflected its
glittering

glittering spires on the trembling surface of the water beneath; the deathlike silence of night was once more changed for scenes of renovated animation; and Nature, roused from the oblivious fetters of sleep, swarmed with its daily portion of life in every quarter. The lark sang merrily as he soared on high; the bounding stag was occasionally seen at his sportive gambols through the forest; and the browsing flocks in the meadow gaily cropped the new-sprung herbage, intermingled with the pearly drops of dew that sparkled in the tiny cup of the sweet smelling cowslip.

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed Charlotte, as she leaned in a meditating posture against the side of the window, “ how beautiful, how sublime is the prospect before me ! and, mortifying reflection ! how happy too every thing seems, for—*man* has not yet appeared to interrupt the short-lived felicity of dependant beings !—Good Heavens ! whence can the pleasure be derived that receives gratification by the banishment of it from the bosom of others ? Ah me ! why are human creatures, gifted with emanations from the Divinity, and reasoning faculties almost celestial, thus prone to mar the works of their Creator, and interrupt the harmony of his wondrous arrangements ? ”

Mademoiselle de Cordet pursued this strain of
H 4 thought

thought till the objects of her reprobation appeared hurrying on every side to the various and customary occupations of the day. One amongst the number particularly attracted her notice; it was Montague, with a book in his hand. He appeared leaning, in a graceful, easy attitude, against the side of an ivy-covered Gothic arch, viewed through a vista in the park, where the tame deer were crowding round him, emulous to fawn upon the generous hand that was distributing some fruit to the greedy claimants.

Charlotte's former system of reasoning was no longer remembered to the prejudice of mankind; at least she began to think there was no general rule without an exception. The next step was natural. Montague exhibited in his own person an instance of that very identical exception, and the late sinking credit of her fellow-mortals seemed by no means in so desperate a state as she had recently imagined it.

 CHAP. XI.

 " I seek

" This unfrequented place, to find some ease

" From restless thoughts, that, like a deadly swarm

" Of hornets arm'd, no sooner found alone,

" But rush upon me thronging, and present

" Time past—*what* once I was, and *what* am now."

MILTON.

HOW it happened Cupid only knows, but so it was, that Charlotte, somehow or other, found her thoughts unaccountably rivetted on this same " elegant, animated statue, placed in a recumbent posture against the ivy-covered Gothic arch, as it met her view through the vista in the park ;" and when the blind urchin once drags imagination astray, the corporeal frame is apt to follow of course. If any casuist is sophistical enough to

dispute the depth of this *very new* discovery, let him turn to the page of King Solomon, that wonderful example of wisdom and self-command from time immemorial to the present instant.

“Charlotte, however, thought not of theoretical disquisitions, where chapter and verse were not necessary for conviction. It was a serene, beautiful morning, and a walk might refresh her spirits, after the sleepless night she had passed; at any rate it was at least preferable to the close confinement of the most spacious apartment, when inclination pointed elsewhere; so, without conceiving any further consideration of the subject a matter of the smallest consequence, out she sallied, having first adjusted her elegant white muslin dress with more attention than was usually bestowed on personal ornaments, and placed her hat in the most becoming fashion, without being conscious of any uncommon solicitude for the effect of such arrangements.

For the exact destination of her steps, Cupid, I believe, must again be answerable; for, almost unknown to herself, she had nearly reached the very spot where “the elegant statue leaned against the ivy-covered Gothic arch, as it met her view,” before (as it appears to the historian of her adventures),

tures), any particular path was fixed upon for her morning ramble.

The above statue, a statue now no longer, turned round to discover what had alarmed some of the wilder fawns, who, erecting their ears in various directions, gave a sudden start, and immediately bounded to a distance.

Montague instantly perceived the cause of their flight, but the effect of it produced very different sensations in his breast; he closed the book in a moment, left "the ivy-covered Gothic arch" to be seen by future admirers of picturesque views, "through distant vistas in parks," and hastily advanced to meet an object fairer, no doubt, in the eyes of a lover, than all the beauties of inanimate nature in the universe.

As no person witnessed the conversation that ensued, the author does not think herself at liberty to "disclose the secrets of the prison house;" she presumes it was interesting, however, from such an interview having been mutually desired by both parties for some time. Neither can she suppose it necessary to add, that the "rosy red" which instantaneously covered the cheeks of the lady on the gentleman's approach, was not the suffusion of a guilty mind, proceeding from an interior conviction of intentional error. No, a sufficient know-

ledge of her previous conduct and principles, it is hoped, has already been obtained to save her from so degrading an idea;—to an inward consciousness of this description, Charlotte de Cordet was uniformly a stranger; her every action must have come purified from the most public investigation, and even her hidden thoughts stood the test of the severest criticism. To tell the truth, though her eyes certainly wandered to “the elegant statue;” yet she had as certainly formed no absolute resolution of shaping her course in that direction; and therefore felt disconcerted and abashed at the implied appearance of impropriety this *tête-à-tête* might exhibit.

The blush, however, proceeding from this reflection, though tenaciously retaining its station, was no longer remembered when the first complimentary ceremonies, after the late separation, were over. Their walk was neither short nor apparently disagreeable, if we may judge from the visible temper of mind in which they both finished it; and from this period a reciprocal understanding appeared to exist between them, which, from the leading traits in their respective characters, proved no less sincere than permanent.

In crossing the gallery, previous to her walk, Mademoiselle de Cordet had met Agathe retiring

to her own apartment, for the purpose of obtaining some repose, after having passed the best part of the preceding night and morning in her Lady's chamber. From her Charlotte had an opportunity of learning Madame de Narbonne's present situation, and found it was such as perfectly removed every friendly degree of anxiety on that subject.

Her heart, thus happily relieved from apprehensions which had partly robbed her of sleep, felt uncommonly light, and tuned to derive pleasure from almost every object that presented itself. The satisfaction of course enjoyed in her ramble with Montague (for we pretend not to deny facts), was pure, and uninterrupted by any solicitude of a disagreeable nature, foreign to the present moment; air, exercise, friendly considerations on Madame's account, and perhaps other circumstances no less conducive to such an effect, had conspired to give a countenance, at all times beautiful, an uncommon degree of interesting expression at this juncture, and drew upon her the eyes of several gentlemen who were walking in the gallery as she hastened past them to the chamber of the Countess, on her return to the Castle.

Mr. Hastings, who had seen by whom she was accompanied from one of the windows, and on glancing a look at them both on their entrance,
instantly

instantly comprehended the nature of their discourse, immediately left the stranger with whom he was conversing, and approached her with a determination to hint at the extent of his knowledge, in a manner that Montague, who saw his design, suspected might hurt her feelings;—he therefore seized him unexpectedly by the arm, and leading him to a distance, procured her an opportunity of escaping unmolested.

She found the Countess still in bed, but awake; and seating herself at her pillow, proceeded with caution to inform her that it was really St. Julian who had thus again caused her so much uneasiness, and no airy phantom of a disordered imagination, which Madame sometimes apprehended might be the case; an idea that never failed to render her extremely unhappy, from the terror she entertained of relapsing once more into a state of insanity.

Charlotte's intelligence, therefore, afforded her mind a temporary relief on this head; but as to the strange resemblance which so unaccountably struck her, either in the air, manner, or voice of St. Julian, this appeared an enigma too deep for solution, and equally puzzled them both. However, in the course of the Countess's future communications, something might possibly transpire, which, united with those circumstances already known of

St.

St. Julian, would perhaps assist in leading to a development of the mystery; at least so her young companion secretly flattered herself, and of course became anxious for a renewal of their former conversation. The morning, or rather forenoon, was beginning to look cloudy, and threatened a thunder storm; but it might afterwards clear up, and then they could proceed to the usual place of rendezvous. Meanwhile she hoped to prevail on Madame to continue the history of her life, in their present situation, till the customary period of leaving the Castle arrived. As this hint was dropped, she rose to ring for breakfast: but the Countess, ignorant of her motive for the continuation of the narrative, did not second her wishes on the subject. With a melancholy smile she begged her to restrain her impatience, assured her it should be gratified in due time, but declined entering upon such topics, except in a place where interruption was not to be apprehended; where her mind, more at ease, could retrace the past in all its most gloomy colouring, and every idea dwell on scenes dear as dreadful to remembrance, undisturbed by an association of images which had never taken place at the rock, though, alas! intrusively recalled to memory by every object that almost appeared in the Castle. In short, happiness and misery in
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the extreme, had been her companions under the different forms of St. Hypolite, and the detested De Verney, in the latter abode. At the recess, though she had certainly partaken of both those sensations, they were; nevertheless, entirely connected in their various branches with one single object alone, and that object ever dearer to her heart than the "ruddy drops" that frequently swelled it almost to bursting. No Republican tyrant (she disclaimed the name of husband) had there presumed to intrude upon her sorrows; nor, in the more particular places of retirement it afforded, could the hand of the mean oppressor reach her. There, and there only, was she guarded from insult; and there alone were her thoughts at liberty to "meditate even to madness."

"Sacred then be its solitary comforts to the purpose of unrestrained affliction!" exclaimed the hapless Countess, with streaming eyes. "The mournful remembrance of him who ought now to have been master of this polluted Castle, shall not be interrupted by the presence of an unprincipled wretch who has dared to usurp the place of his betters! No, Charlotte, while it is practicable to reach the rock, there shall the remainder of my sad story be communicated! Should the consolation
of

of that retreat be afterwards unattainable, why then—but I will not suppose it.”

The Countess paused for a moment, and sunk upon her pillow.

At length she thus continued:—“ You say St. Julian has positively been here; it is strange that his whole manner, voice, and appearance should be so wonderfully sealed with the impression indelibly marked on my memory! Can you yet procure no further intelligence respecting this young man?—Ah me! sure I am the weakest of human beings, thus to let my thoughts linger on the visionary ideas that occur too forcibly for my peace on such occasions! Forgive me, dearest girl, if I once more put your goodness to the test of practice—will you again make another attempt to gratify me on this tormenting topic?”

“ Will I!” repeated Charlotte, eagerly. “ Can you doubt my readiness to serve you? Name but the means, and depend upon it, Madame, it shall not be my fault if success does not follow every exertion for the purpose.”

“ My wish is merely a repetition of former ones,” replied the Countess. “ I am still anxious to develop the strange mystery that surrounds this interesting St. Julian. Agathe tells me Madame d’Angereau, and one or two other ladies, arrived
about

about an hour ago. I never was on an intimate footing with any of the number formerly, and our present sentiments, on most subjects, are of too opposite a nature to admit of a change in that respect. They come not to the Castle as my visitors; I have, therefore, excused my personal attendance under the pretence of, what is indeed true, indisposition. The Countess, ever eager for news, picks up all she hears indiscriminately, and retails it again with as little ceremony;—much of a trifling nature, not to give it a worse appellation, must of course be repeated; but something may possibly be gathered from the whole. Though a Democrat from fashion, rather than principle, she is desirous, at the same time, of obtaining the reputation of impartiality; and when that whim is the predominant affectation, good and bad on both sides is ostentatiously displayed to her auditors; and Madame d'Angereau has always auditors, for she is rich and handsome. Repair then to the room in which the visitors are assembled, and oblige me by procuring what information you can learn on a subject which continually agitates my mind in a most inexplicable manner, whenever any new incident occurs more immediately to recal it."

Charlotte readily undertook the task assigned her.

her. Having therefore finished her coffee, and prevailed with Madame de Narbonne to drink a single cup of it, Agathe was called to assist the latter in dressing, while Mademoiselle de Cordet bent her steps to the breakfasting room.

Mr. Hastings and Montague were leaning over an open window at a distance from the other visitors, when she entered, and appeared to be deeply engaged in a low conversation. The Chevalier's eyes, however, had frequently been directed to the door, in expectation of her arrival; they now met her's, and Hastings instantly perceiving the new beam of sparkling pleasure that suddenly illumined his fine countenance, turned round to discover the cause of it. That was quickly explained when he saw her advancing to pay her respects to the Countess d'Angereau; and the first convenient opportunity which offered, was seized with avidity to whisper his approbation of her preceding conduct, and the happiness experienced from the *eclaircissement* which had taken place between her and his friend. In fact, Montague judged it better to relate the particulars of an affair so momentous to his peace, than leave a man, who had proved himself more than a father to him in every respect, ignorant of circumstances which he well knew would afford his worthy heart
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the sincerest satisfaction. He had long been acquainted with his predilection for Charlotte, whom he considered as a character of a very superior description; and therefore ardently wished for an event of this nature, as the surest means, in his opinion, of securing the young man's future felicity in life. She herself henceforth experienced the benefit derived from this confidence, by an increase of friendly offices on the part of Hastings. Besides being less subjected to his turn for raillery, than was otherwise the case, he endeavoured, on every possible occasion, to serve her, with a solicitude rather visible in actions than words, and spared no trouble in trying to give M. de Clermont a more favourable idea of Montague's fortune, rank, and merit, than he hitherto possessed, high as his sentiments certainly were of the latter, and much as he had esteemed him from the first commencement of their acquaintance.

As Mrs. Montague resided in the neighbourhood of the Castle, her son's frequent appearance there was no way remarkable; and on their account Mr. Hastings had prolonged his visit much beyond his original intention. All places, however, were pretty equal in his eyes, provided those he esteemed sanctified them by their presence; and therefore

therefore finding his abode in this quarter was not only a secret gratification to his young friend, but likewise, in some points of view, a political advantage to others, he was easily persuaded to remain occasionally at the Castle, or its vicinity, as best suited the circumstances of the times.

CHAP. XII.

“ Friendless, he the army fought,
“ Bent upon peril; in the range of death
“ Resolv’d to hunt for fame, and with his sword
“ To gain distinction which his birth deny’d.”

HOME.

EXCEPT the two Englishmen, Charlotte found the rest of the company more bent upon speaking themselves, than listening to others; she contrived, however, with some difficulty to introduce the subject on which her thoughts were most occupied, and speedily perceived that the name of St. Julian, with the high estimation in which his character was held by the Royalists, were not more generally known than the uniform humanity of his conduct to the vanquished of the opposite party, which had evidently

evidently rendered him respectable even to his enemies.

But, notwithstanding the acknowledged generosity of his disposition in public transactions frequently made him a topic of conversation to each of the contending factions, which at this time mutually shed the blood of their unhappy countrymen, still every *item* relative to the private history of his earlier days seemed buried in unfathomable obscurity.

It is true, *report*, as usual, was not idle on the occasion, and many anecdotes were given on its authority, the nature of which was not much calculated to obtain any considerable degree of credit; but, on the contrary, rather served to involve the whole affair in deeper shades of perplexity, from the incongruous and contradictory accounts with which they obviously abounded. All, however, seemed unanimous in agreeing that he derived little or no advantage from the adventitious circumstance of superior birth; and that interior worth, talents, and courage had formed the principal superstructure of his present pre-eminence.

One gentleman alone seemed enabled to speak with more precision on the subject; but he appeared averse to enter upon particulars, and his limited communications were of course unsatisfactory

factory on those points where Charlotte was most anxious for information.

In spite of his visible caution, however, Madame d'Angereau's ever wakeful curiosity gave him no rest till he was insensibly led to dwell upon the cause that excited it, with some degree of prolixity; and though he studiously avoided all intelligence of a private description, several traits were given of the young man's character, which proclaimed, at least, true nobility of mind, if not of station, and interested the feelings of the company more than ever in his behalf.

"The day in which his name was enrolled among the number of the defenders of the Royal standard," said his present panegyrist, "was to him a day of happiness. It is true he might possibly have few relatives to lament a separation from, and a sword might possibly too be the principal part of his personal property, and almost the single auxiliary on which he was to depend for a future establishment in life; but the military line was particularly his choice, and the predilection he had long evinced for it, has been justified by the event. No opportunity that the desultory profession of a soldier offered for observation was neglected; his capacious mind drew improvement from every object that presented itself, and quickly soared

soared superior to the supposed disadvantages of a plebeian parentage: he examined with attention, he meditated with profit, even his pleasures have tended to the acquirement of knowledge and instruction. Wherever the horrors of war have spread devastation, he has exercised that intrepid courage, that innate valour, that benevolent and disinterested humanity, which are not found in common minds.

At the surrender of a village, which the Republicans had defended with bravery, but where, notwithstanding their resistance, they were conquered, the soldiers rushed with fury on the field of battle, and sought revenge for the opposition they had encountered.—Piercing cries of distress are heard; St. Julian flies with the rapidity of lightning, forces his way through the assailants, and reaches an apartment, where two unhappy women stood in an agony of grief, whilst an intrepid young man defended them, and dispersed with his sword all those who had the temerity to approach; but when he saw St. Julian, to whose character he was no stranger, though unacquainted with him except by sight, he advanced towards the gallant youth with that confidence which virtue preserves in the hour of misfortune.—“ I yield to you,” said he: “ I would have sacrificed my life in defence of my

widowed mother and sister; but you will now be their defender and support. In placing them under the protection of the Chevalier St. Julian, my mind is free from all uneasiness."

"The trust reposed in the young Colonel's honour was justified by his subsequent conduct; the Republican became his friend, and the mother and daughter vied with each other in evincing their gratitude on every possible occasion. This event has ever been remembered by St. Julian with real satisfaction, and he still speaks of it with sensibility, but with that modesty natural to a noble mind, which, in performing a good action, thinks it has done nothing of which the generality of mankind are incapable."

"What a charming fellow!" exclaimed Madame d'Angereau; "I am absolutely captivated with your account of him, Monsieur. Political opinions have nothing to do with individual merit, which ought to receive its due portion of applause in despite of every foreign consideration; not but I confess myself pleased to find the hero of the piece is the artificer of his own fortune, and by no means indebted to a long line of worm-eaten ancestors either for hereditary pride, wealth, or weakness.—Well, I repeat it, he is really a fine fellow!"

Charlotte's eyes expressed sentiments of a similar nature too forcibly, to require the additional aid of

language; but the intelligence with which they beamed, was quickly obscured by a more serious cast of countenance, when she accidentally perceived the ardent, though mournful looks of Montague rivetted on her face, with an air of dejection that bespoke his mind under the influence of some peculiar and painful sensation.

Unconscious of being herself the cause of these appearances, because free from every idea of intentional offence, she gazed upon him with a degree of tender concern and regret, which spoke more powerfully to his feelings than she was aware of; and with increasing amazement she saw his features instantly undergo another alteration, as visibly expressive of pleasure, as the former had exhibited symptoms of a contrary description.

Hastings had now been leaning on the back of her chair for some time; but his whole attention was at this juncture bestowed upon the eulogist of St. Julian, several of whose meritorious actions he himself had witnessed, and to whose superior worth he gladly paid the tribute of well-earned applause.

Too much pre-occupied, therefore, to attend to what was passing on any other topic, he neither remarked Charlotte's sudden surprise, nor the dejection of his friend (whose station happened to be immediately opposite to them) till applied to by

her for a solution of the mystery, accompanied by a whispered apprehension that the cause of her enquiry proceeded from some latent return of bad health, which he endeavoured to conceal from observation by an attempt at cheerfulness.

“ Make yourself perfectly easy on that head,” said a gay, laughing lady, who overheard her enquiry. Being a greater proficient in the language of the eyes than Mademoiselle de Cordet, she perceived their direction, and consequently discovered the source of his emotion, while he gazed on the object of his attachment with looks not to be misunderstood by a veteran like herself in affairs of the heart.

“ Make yourself perfectly easy, my dear Mademoiselle, on that head,” repeated the votary of fashion; “ Mr. Montague is only trying to recollect and assimilate some lines of his countryman, Pope, to the particular feelings of the moment;—let me see—I am a tolerable English scholar, I believe—

“ Envy, to which th’ ignoble mind’s a slave,

“ Is emulation in the learn’d and brave.”

Aye, that’s the very thing—the sole subject of his meditations;—am I not right, Chevalier? Rivals

in

in love, or fame, are equally objects of detestation."

"If your words are addressed to me, Madam," replied Montague, slowly raising his head from the arm that leaned on a table before him, and turning round to the last speaker, "I confess their tendency is not quite obvious. I envy no man, and know not to what you allude."

"Perhaps so," returned she, with a sarcastic air; "but Mademoiselle de Cordet's eyes contained explanatory notes to the imaginary enigma, when the Chevalier St. Julian's merit was the subject of discussion."

Another gloomy cloud obscured the transient gleam of sunshine latterly visible on the countenance of Montague; he silently rose, and walked to the window.

Madame d'Angereau had interrupted Charlotte's attention to the passing scene, by a number of frivolous questions respecting the Countess de Narbonne's manner of spending her time, and the cause of De la Ville's absence; she was therefore partly ignorant of what was going on between the two antagonists, but was struck with the manner in which Montague regarded her, previous to leaving his seat. Unable to comprehend the cause of the various changes his features had exhibited

in so short a space of time, she concluded something very serious must have happened to distress him; and, without being sensible of it herself, became suddenly absorbed in thought, and absent in her answers to Madame d'Angereau, who, however, perfectly occupied with the agreeable sound of her own voice, did not immediately remark the alteration which had now taken place in her neighbour.

Mr. Hastings, however, was not quite so inattentive to surrounding objects. Madame de Morson's hints, which were too obvious to be misunderstood, recalled to his memory some former observations, tending to the same purport, that had occurred to himself as circumstances of a suspicious nature at the time. He therefore took his station by the above lady, and became his friend's ostensible champion, in order to discover whether appearances had really been sufficiently strong to exculpate her from forming too hasty a conclusion;—an error which he had lately accused himself of committing, but which he now began to apprehend might not, perhaps, be altogether of the most censurable description.

Madame de Morson, the chosen companion of the Countess d'Angereau, was not formed by Nature for a philosopher; neither did she possess
any

any violent predilection for that character in others. The serious manner in which Hastings addressed her, was not considered as the most agreeable in the world, and she felt by no means disposed to answer his enquiries in a similar style. But light raillery, and pert repartee, ill suit a mind bent upon investigations devoted to the interests of friendship, and he bore impatiently with both, only in the expectation of deriving some accidental information; for if "in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom," in the multitude of words there might likewise be some to answer his purpose; and in this idea he was not finally mistaken. It evidently appeared that Madame de Morson had remarked the avidity with which Charlotte listened to the unconnected accounts received of St. Julian's history; but it was no less clear that Montague's attachment had also attracted her attention in a much greater degree: and to the deep interest which Mademoiselle de Cordet always took in the affairs of the young soldier, was consequently attributed the visible dejection of his supposed rival, whom Madame imagined equally envied him on the score of "love and fame."

Though Charlotte's supposed partiality to St. Julian had not come under his particular notice on the present occasion, still Mr. Hastings

remembered that such an idea had formerly in fact occurred; the coincidence, therefore, in opinion that now existed between Madame de Morfon and himself, seemed to imply something more than the mere imaginary suggestions of suspicion; and, in short, a certain degree of scepticism in regard to the existing consistency of his late favourite's principles and character, took a momentary possession of his mind.

Though naturally eccentric in many of his sentiments, Mr. Hastings was uniformly a man of the strictest honour in every sense of the word. On the chapter of *female delicacy* he was peculiarly tenacious; and Charlotte's first recommendation to his notice originated from the marked adherence she evidently displayed to the rules it prescribed, no less than to her beauty and superior abilities; of course he now felt inconceivably mortified to think the appearance of these virtues had been only assumed to cover a light mind and a versatile disposition, which it particularly behoved him to unveil, lest his young friend Montague should fall a victim to the hitherto well-managed deception.

A little farther reflection, however, on the general tenor of that conduct thus secretly reprobated at this juncture, soon convinced him he had nearly formed a wrong conclusion; and therefore,

to dispel every remaining doubt, and clear up the matter entirely, he determined to request an explanation from herself, whenever a proper opportunity could be obtained for its accomplishment.

Having taken this resolution, he seized Montague by the arm, and they left the apartment together.

Perceiving no further intelligence was to be procured about St. Julian at this juncture, Charlotte rose to join Madame de Narbonne, and communicate the few particulars which had transpired on the subject. The rest of the company proposed a ramble in the pleasure grounds, and were already departed for that purpose, when the Countess d'Angereau, whose attention happened to be attracted by the same painting that formerly furnished a subject for contemplation to St. Julian, accidentally twisted her ankle as she turned to leave the portico.

The rest of the visitors were by this time at a distance; but her shrill and sudden scream reached Charlotte, who instantly flew back to enquire the cause of it. As no other assistance was at hand, she found herself under the necessity of supporting the impatient sufferer to the nearest seat that offered; where having at length placed her with some difficulty, summoned her *femme de chambre*,

and given proper directions on the occasion, she hastened from the din of unceasing volubility and childish complaint, lest another similar event should happen to make a further trial of her forbearance and good-nature necessary.

In crossing the gallery, a glass door leading to the library opened, when Mr. Hastings appeared; he begged to speak with her for a few moments; she gave him her hand, and silently followed his steps.

A pause now ensued, which was quickly broken by some unintelligible, half-uttered exclamations on the part of her conductor, whose eyes seemed to reproach her with the commission of errors to which she knew herself a stranger.

Though pretty much accustomed to the peculiarities of his manner, she was unusually struck with it at present; and therefore, after regarding him with a strong expression of surprise, intimated her wish for an explanation, as she was then on her way to Madame's apartment, and could not possibly be much longer detained.

Mr. Hastings answered by a blunt and simple question—"Was she, or was she not, sincere in the sentiments she professed for Montague, as repeated nearly in her own words by his young friend?"

Charlotte, whose mind was superior to every species

species of false shame, and did not conceive there could be any thing inconsistent with innate modesty in acknowledging an attachment to the particular friend of him for whom she entertained it, and whose uncommon merit so fully justified the election of her heart, hesitated not to reply in a manner that ought to have removed every doubt of her veracity. Another query, however, succeeded, that was not quite so open to explanation—"Why then, or from what cause, proceeded the evident interest she seemed to take in every event, however distantly connected with St. Julian's affairs? This question was rather *mal-a-propos*; she paused a little upon it; but conceiving the plain path easiest to travel in, determined to tell the truth as far as it merely related to her own share in the business—further she had no right to go; nor could any person compel her to betray the secrets of those who had confided in her. She therefore repeated, without circumlocution, every circumstance relative to her own immediate knowledge and acquaintance with St. Julian, and detailed the whole with an air of sincerity so impressively forcible, as could not fail to have its just weight in the eyes of her interrogator, who no longer felt inclined to doubt her asseverations, even though a certain veil of mystery still enveloped

some part of the business in shades of the deepest obscurity. She did not, however, conceive herself at liberty to lift that veil, in spite of the disagreeable inferences she was conscious might be drawn from its concealment; and positively refused to gratify any curiosity at the expence of friendship, in the form of Madame de Narbonne, whatever difficulties or distress might be the consequence to herself by this line of conduct.

Mr. Hastings had sufficient penetration to perceive that no trifling motive could be the original cause of such a determination; and forbore to perplex her any longer on a subject which she honestly confessed was at present scarcely known to herself, and wrapped in incomprehensibility beyond her own powers of discrimination to investigate with any degree of certainty.

The short conversation that ensued was of a nature to restore mutual confidence. Mr. Hastings spoke warmly in favour of Montague, and declared his intention of making him his heir; after which they separated—the former particularly in a very different temper of mind from what he had lately experienced.

On quitting the library, Charlotte now first perceived that on flying to Madame d'Angereau's assistance, she had carelessly dropped a book given
her

her by Montague, for Madame de Narbonne's perusal, at their interview in the morning; but which she had then forgot to deliver. Vexed at a repetition of such apparent negligence, she hastily turned back to rectify her error; but unwilling to encounter the Countess d'Angereau, or any of her party who might happen to have left the walks, she descended by a different staircase to the quarter of the Castle appropriated to the use of the domestics, and dispatched one of them in search of what she wanted.

While waiting the return of the messenger, a seal of uncommon beauty attracted her notice; it lay in an old inkstand dish, placed on a small table near one of the windows, and was apparently of a description superior to any other article in its vicinity. The device was a phoenix rising from two burning hearts, and the motto "Unchangeable;" the workmanship was masterly, and the value of the whole such as she conceived must be considerable.

Surprised to find a thing of this value in its present situation, she eagerly questioned the servant, on his return, respecting the circumstance, and learned that he himself had found it on the verge of the forest some days ago. Finding the man was willing to part with his prize, she gave him a
handsome

handsome gratuity, and putting it into her pocket, repaired to the chamber of the Countess.

The intervening period of her absence had been passed by that lady in calming the tumults of an agitated mind, and preparing it to meet, with becoming fortitude, whatever future disappointments awaited her. She felt that "hope sprung eternal in the human breast;" but the following line, in which the poet asserts that "*man never is, but always to be blest,*" did not seem verified by her own experience; and while she sighed over the sad conviction of its self-proven falsity, she endeavoured, at the same time, to repress expectation, and banish the intruder Hope from her heart; where, however baseless the foundation he generally built upon, his station was nevertheless sometimes taken, till second thoughts, those friends to common sense, but ever inimical to the fabric of hasty conclusions, or the airy illusions they engender, drove him to a distance.

Though once more fatally convinced of her error in thus giving the reins to imagination, Madame de Narbonne experienced a sensation of pleasure on a repetition of the praises bestowed upon St. Julian, which, though sweet and grateful to her ear, was still, on reflection, perfectly incomprehensible in whatever light she viewed it;—but when

Charlotte

Charlotte mentioned the incident of the seal, and produced it for her examination, the short-lived, fallacious sentiment of satisfaction that had lately throbbed at her heart, was instantaneously changed to a far different feeling; the colour again forsook her cheek, the trinket dropped from her trembling fingers, a faint exclamation issued from her pallid lips, and before Mademoiselle de Cordet could fly from the other side of the chamber, whither she had gone for her work, the unhappy Countess lay extended on the floor, apparently deprived of all recollection!

It has already been observed that Madame de Narbonne was early in life subject to similar complaints; these which, under proper care and management, might probably have been eradicated at the period of their first appearance, had long become constitutional disorders, too powerful in their nature to be now conquered, and gained almost daily strength from a coincidence of painful occurrences which had taken place since the time of her marriage with M. de la Ville.

A knowledge of this circumstance rendered those more particularly about her person extremely careful in avoiding every thing that might be thought productive of such an effect; but nevertheless her peculiar situation frequently laid her
open

open to accidents, attended with consequences of this description, and the present was one of the number. Charlotte would have been the last creature on earth to have caused the Countess the smallest degree of pain, could she have foreseen what was to happen. No wonder then that vexation and surprise were equally predominant on an event so totally unsuspected; she saw the seal was the original source of it, but could not imagine from whence its powerful influence was derived. Madame no sooner began to recover, than she once more requested to see it; and while her eyes rested upon the motto, the silent, coursing tear repeatedly deluged the characters that composed it.

At length—"Where was this well-remembered trinket found," asked she, in a low, tremulous accent, "and from whom did you receive it?"

Charlotte quickly satisfied her on these two subjects; but she wished to question the servant more minutely on the occasion, and he was therefore summoned to attend his Lady.

Her enquiries, however, were not productive of any further intelligence than what she already knew; the man had previously related the extent of his knowledge to Charlotte, and she was obliged to rest contented with the narrow limits it afforded

for

for conjecture, without being able to form any opinion, or draw any certain conclusion from an incident so inexplicable. The arms upon the seal, and the motto it contained, belonged to the family of St. Cyprian, and appeared to be exactly the same she had formerly given, with some other valuable trinkets, to her foster-sister, when the infant son of St. Hypolite was unfortunately consigned to her care. No wonder then if its re-appearance was hailed with tears, fainting, and distress!—Madame de Narbonne was too much agitated to think of leaving her room for some time: towards evening, however, she had reasoned herself into a greater degree of fortitude; and at their united request, Mr. Hastings, Mr. Montague, and M. de Clermont, who arrived about that period, were admitted to visit her in her dressing-room. The conversation took its colour from political events, which now wore an aspect more favourable to Royalism, and seemed to promise a counter-revolution on that side of the question. Mr. Hastings observed, that from all that could be learned by the accounts of people upon the spot, of the inordinate authority assumed by the rulets of the opposite party, and their sanguinary proceedings, it appeared evident their popularity was upon the wane. Their rigour and unjustifiable brutality had indeed rendered

rendered them proper objects of general detestation; but necessity, he said, was the plea for both, and equally suitable to other acts of abominable atrocity—it was the pretence under which every enormity was attempted to be excused.—“And after all,” he asked, “what is this same necessity composed of? What constitutes its principal force? Why, the will of Robespierre and Marat, who sanction themselves from public reprehension, or rather endeavour to do so, under the plausible but fallacious assertion of this self-created source of action; deprived of which pretext, they would probably be at a loss to gloss over the continual commission of evil, were it even evident that moral good might sometimes happen to spring from it—a supposition, however, on the infallibility of which I am by no means disposed to place much confidence.”

M. de Clermont agreed in these sentiments, and concluded by saying, that in his opinion, the fabric, which was supported by such pillars, could not be built for any permanent length of duration; and a legislature (if it can be called one) which thus lent its assistance to systemize desolation and bloodshed, by aiding despotic tyrants, whose every deed seemed replete with human misery, was not fit to be trusted with the care of an empire once so distinguished

distinguished in the milder and more civilized annals of society and on whose model neighbouring nations were proud to form themselves as the standard of perfection.

This last observation was a little too hard of digestion for the English stomach of Mr. Hastings; and a humorous dialogue ensued, from which the Countess seemed at first to derive some amusement. Unfortunately, however, an anecdote of Marat happened to be introduced, to illustrate the system of example mentioned by the antagonist of Hastings, which, in its principal circumstances, bore too striking a similitude to what the Countess herself had experienced of his undeviating wickedness, not to affect her in a particular manner.

They soon perceived the sudden and melancholy alteration her countenance now exhibited; but, ignorant of the cause, concluded a return of her late indisposition had produced it, and accordingly arose to depart, without receiving any request to prolong their visit. Charlotte and Montague had previously enjoyed an agreeable but short *tête-à-tête* in a bow window, at the farther end of the room, and were only partially acquainted with the subject of dispute, though the former, having occasionally caught most of what passed, was soon able to account for the indisposition of Madame; when,

as the other gentlemen called upon her companion, to join them, she hastily turned round, and saw the pale, pensive, dejected features of that lady, whose mind seemed absorbed in deep and gloomy meditation, as her eyes rested on the floor, no longer attentive to exterior objects.

She mentioned not the cause of her present distress, however, and Charlotte made no enquiries on a topic it was easy to see was of no very pleasant description. The remainder of the evening, and the following forenoon, passed over much in the same manner;—before the conclusion of the latter, Charlotte, however, found an opportunity of shewing the seal to Montague, who, as we have formerly seen, was related in a distant degree to the family of St. Cyprian. The arms belonging to that noble House he perfectly recognized in those now exhibited; and had even an indistinct idea of having slightly noticed this very identical seal in the possession of some person with whom he had lately been in company, though without seeing it sufficiently near to discover the particular engraving or motto upon it. In this supposition he proved, however, mistaken.

Charlotte's curiosity was dreadfully tantalized by such a deficiency of memory; and her countenance, ever true to the feelings of her heart, strongly

strongly displayed what was passing there. To this mental agitation she was upon the point of giving expression in words, by pronouncing the name of St. Julian, when raising her eyes to those of Montague, she saw the latter regarding her motions with a fixed look of the deepest interest and anxiety.

This momentary observation instantly recalled to remembrance the recent conversation she had held with Mr. Hastings, and the difficulty with which she convinced him of her innocence as to any particular connection with the young Royalist. She also recollected that the only fault discoverable in the character of Montague, was an inclination to jealousy, which her own remarks upon his disposition and temper convinced her was but too well founded. She therefore prudently checked her wish for enquiry; and as the Countess was ignorant of what he related respecting the seal, she determined to confine his intelligence to her own breast, till some fortunate accident occurred to discover the truth, or at least render the search after it more safe than it appeared to be in the present instance.

CHAP. XIII.

“ The heart that sorrow doom’d to share,
“ Has worn the frequent seal of woe ;
“ Its sad impresson learns to bear,
“ And finds full oft its ruin slow.”

LANGHORNE.

THE Countess, finding herself able to reach the recess, left the Castle at an earlier period than usual; and, accompanied by her companion, on whose arm she leant during their walk, entered the saloon, where, after having rested herself for a few minutes, instead of repairing to the gloomy confines of the chapel, and resuming their former station amidst the monumental memorials of the dead, she led the way to the interior of the rock, through the customary door, which closing upon them, was soon concealed from observation by the thick

thick spreading foliage of the green-house plants, whose friendly shade completely secured it from every probable chance of discovery.

Having proceeded a short way to the right, they came to a door partly hidden in the windings of the passage. The Countess immediately unlocked it, and Charlotte found herself in a small but beautiful apartment, with a finely proportioned Gothic window at the opposite end, of dimensions suitable to the size of the room, and ornamented with some elegant pieces of painted glass;—like the other casements, however, of this place, it was almost overshadowed by the aromatic shrubs which grew from the crevices of the projecting pieces of rock that hung over and excluded it from exterior observation. This circumstance diffused a degree of gloom through the whole chamber; and indeed the furniture that was placed in it, seemed of a description rather calculated to increase than remove that effect; every thing conveyed an idea of pensive melancholy, and bespoke the mind of its possessor still deeply absorbed in the sad luxury of those mental contemplations which the broken spirit of affliction delights to indulge, but from which the gay and the happy, thoughtless of future vicissitudes, hastily turn away.

The sighs of the Countess, which were rather
deep

deep than loud, were all that for a short period interrupted the solemn stillness of the place, unless it was the monotonous dashing of the water against the sides of the rock, which at regular intervals was heard below, and spread over the mind a soothing but mournful sensation of pleasure.

Madame de Narbonne at length seemed to recal her wandering thoughts; and turning from the window against which she leant, with her eyes intensely rivetted on the river beneath, pointed to a seat. Charlotte, who during this time had been occupied in examining the sculptured walls, with whatever else happened to be worthy of notice, instantly obeyed the signal; and after another momentary pause, the Countess again commenced her own historian.

“ Those details of the early part of my life which I have already given, were dear, though deadly to remembrance! Some joy for ever lost! some recollection where pleasure, intermingled with pain, rendered every circumstance impressive and interesting to my heart, were deeply interwoven with each other on the bleeding tablet of a too faithful memory, and the mind and the lips lingered in fond procrastination over every image which presented itself of this nature with a cherished - but tormenting degree of stability,
unknown

unknown to those who, like me, have trembled beneath the wide extremes of happiness and misery! To be exempt from error is not the allotted portion of humanity! of guilt, however, this cannot be said; in that point we are left free to stand or fall by our own actions: and no accusing spirit whispers I have any thing to reproach myself with on the score of intentional evil. My sorrows can, therefore, be recalled to view, unawed by the terrors of conscious criminality; and while the barbed arrow of misfortune rankles in my bosom, that bosom still throbs over some visionary form of long departed joy deeply connected with the very pang that wrings its feelings to agony.—Such are the mingled sensations which arise on the sad retrospections of early life! such the invisible, the incomprehensible tie that insensibly draws the thoughts to rest, with persevering constancy, on every circumstance connected with the chosen husband of my youth; and such the intrusive feelings which have hitherto, during the course of my former narration, contributed to lengthen the recital beyond its necessary limits. I appeared to be still in the presence of St. Hypolite, while dwelling on scenes *in which he had borne so conspicuous a part*. His image once more stood before me clothed in a corporeal form; I fancied the melody

of his voice yet vibrated on my ear; and under the self-created deception, my sorrows for an instant vanished from view, while sweet but momentary ideas of restored felicity took their place, replete with peace, consolation, and unutterable delight. No wonder then that the historian so frequently wandered from the plain matter-of-fact path, to one more diffusive of pleasure;—temporary it is true, but exquisite were such meditations.— But, ah me! why do I thus continually conjure up the illusive phantoms of a heated brain? Why give the rein to indulgences of so dangerous a nature? Few are the errors of this kind that now remain to try your patience; for, alas! few are the sweets that have mingled in the subsequent bitter events which court attention! No milk of human kindness there warms the breast, or produces the finer susceptibilities of the heart! No congeniality in sentiment, no fondly remembered endearment fix the care-worn eye in silent recollection, or thrill through the veins with unutterable tenderness! Misfortune has no friendly soother; and Disappointment feels not the softening hand of Affection to smooth its rugged pillow! All nature appears now one universal blank, deprived of every intervening ray of sunshine, and exposed to the wild roaring of the “pitiless storm,” without a
single

single resting point for the harassed mind to repose upon! Horror, in its darkest hue, henceforth marks my destiny; yet, while every better feeling of mortality shrinks from the depth of that abyss into which I have fallen, my heart sometimes proudly swells superior to its lot, and throbs against that revolting tyranny to which the incomprehensible chain of human incidents has unhappily subjected it!—Ah me!

“ How gladly would I meet

“ Mortality, my sentence, and be to earth

“ Insensible! *”

A considerable pause now ensued; the Countess was again buried in thought; an air of dejection overspread her countenance, but it was more expressive of indignant sorrow than tender melancholy; while her eyes were at one time suffused with tears, at another raised to Heaven with a half-restrained look of reproach, which she vainly struggled to convert into that of mental fortitude and resignation.

At length she proceeded:—

“ Soon after the murder of the royal, ill-fated, and most unfortunate prisoners in the Temple, I

* Milton.

received a few lines without any signature, entreating my immediate presence in Paris, as I valued the future peace of those dearest to me on earth; adding, that at the south end of the *Rue St. Honoré* I should find a person waiting my arrival, from whom further information might be obtained respecting the contents of this epistle.

“ Though this mysterious request was couched in the most cautious manner, and instantaneous compliance urged with an earnestness of expression which scarcely admitted of hesitation, yet at first, I confess, it appeared so very suspicious, that I remained for a short time quite uncertain what to determine upon. On reading it over again, however, I easily discovered the writer to be Magdeleine de Mercour, from a private mark formerly agreed upon between us, to ascertain the authenticity of a correspondence which commenced under a variety of circumstances too unfavourable not to render every precaution for ensuring its safety necessary; and the situation of the country, since the beginning of the present troubles, has not been of a nature to obviate any apprehensions previously entertained on that subject. Prior to that period I had not heard from Madame de Mercour for some time, and began to be seriously alarmed by
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the lengthened term of her silence. The contents of this letter were little calculated to lessen those fears; they served, indeed, to increase them in no small degree, for I was perfectly convinced that some affair of the utmost consequence must have occurred to occasion the request therein contained; otherwise she, who was fully acquainted with my inclination and motives for retirement, would never have expressed herself so strongly on a topic, well known to be diametrically repugnant to every wish of my heart, and every plan I had formed for the remainder of my life. The imperious call of necessity must, therefore, have compelled her to this step; and though no other human being could, perhaps, have had power to drag me from Narbonne, the sister of St. Hypolite, my sole existing friend, was certainly entitled to any sacrifice from me, and I hastened to obey her summons, while my heart beat with prophetic sensations of impending evil.

“ I arrived at Paris in as private a manner as possible, and immediately repairing to the *Rue St. Honoré*, was speedily accosted by the confidential maid of my friend, though so completely disguised, that at first I was at a loss to recollect her. Her communications were short, and cautiously given; she kept a watchful eye of observation on every

K 3

surrounding

surrounding object while speaking, and then putting her finger on her lips to enjoin silence, whispered me to accompany her without delay. I did so; and after a great variety of turnings and windings, at length we arrived at a small obscure habitation, where I quickly found myself in the affectionate arms of my dear Magdeleine; and after the first transports, occasioned by our meeting in safety, had subsided, I was entrusted with the affair that rendered my presence necessary in the capital.

CHAP. XIV.

“ Stern Debate,
“ And foul Diffension, kindle here their torch,
“ To usher in my greatness.”

WHITEHEAD.

“ DURING Madame de Mercour’s residence with her husband in the capital of the German Empire, she had formed an intimate acquaintance with a family of high rank, in whose house a near relation of her father’s was then on a visit. This lady was young, uncommonly beautiful, and endowed with every mental and personal accomplishment hitherto bestowed on the most favoured of her sex. The rank and situation of those with whom she was staying, rendered their frequent appearance at Court necessary. She usually accom-

K 4 panied

panied them there, and to be seen and admired were synonymous terms with their fair guest.

“ However superior in the adventitious circumstances of wealth or station, the hearts of sovereign Rulers are, we know, constructed pretty much on the same principles, and formed of the same materials with those of their meanest subjects. The Imperial but amiable Joseph II. did not pretend to dispute the truth of a fact, of which he was experimentally convinced. Every person has heard of the dislike this illustrious character expressed to all degrees of ceremony, and the popularity which his affable and conciliating manners obtained him.—He became almost a daily visiter at the Baron d’Alembert’s, and in the familiar intercourse of private life, discovered a thousand attractions in the lovely Victorine, which would otherwise have escaped his notice. Flattered by the distinguished attentions of this great and good Monarch, but still more attached to the virtues of the man, than the rank of the Emperor, Victorine felt it impossible to see him thus constantly with indifference. Alarmed at the hopeless prospect that presented itself to her thoughts, she took her heart severely to task for its presumption: the investigation, however, afforded little satisfaction; it had been too long delayed, and she found it utterly impossible to banish the image of him to whom
that

that heart had unconsciously been given. Her morals were nevertheless good, and the principles of real virtue were firmly established in her mind. If the hopeless passion that rankled in her bosom was not to be eradicated, it might at least be concealed from the world, who, if acquainted with the height to which her wishes had soared, would probably laugh at the visionary folly of the presumptuous aspirer, and treat her feelings on the occasion with contempt and derision.

“Fraught with apprehensions of this description, the young and beautiful cousin of St. Hypolite gradually declined appearing to the Emperor when he called at the Baron’s; and, under various pretences, likewise avoided accompanying her friends to Court, when the necessary ceremonial of attendance required their presence.

“At first the new mode of conduct she had thus adopted was pursued without causing much surprise, but that could not long be supposed the case; and the observations that consequently followed, produced a discovery not very difficult to make, when the smallest attention was bestowed upon it, *viz.* that her spirits and health had equally suffered a change for the worse. The inclination for solitude which she indulged on every possible occasion, fully ascertained the former; while her altered looks and hectic complaints gave indications

of an approaching decline, too apparent not to cause the most alarming anxiety to those interested in her welfare.

“ This circumstance was no sooner conveyed by common report to the Imperial Joseph, than the extent of that passion which he had hitherto secretly cherished, made itself sufficiently known; and he felt, if finally deprived of Victorine, life, rank, crowns, and sceptres had no longer any attraction for him. He therefore instantly repaired to the Baron’s, determined to judge of her real situation from his own observation. The Baron and his family, however, were from home.

“ But where then is Mademoiselle de Savigny?” asked the Monarch; “ I understood she was too much indisposed to go abroad.—Does she accompany them?”

“ The answer returned to this question convinced him his visit was well-timed, and the servant received an order to conduct him immediately to her presence.

“ Left to herself, after the departure of the Baron and Baroness d’Alembert, who had consented to leave her behind with great reluctance, poor Victorine retired to a sequestered alcove in the garden, where, weeping and alone, she gave free vent to her sorrows, which occupied her so entirely,

entirely, that the Emperor was at her side before his approach was even suspected. An *eclaircissement* now took place of the tenderest nature; and the Imperial Joseph soon drew from the artless girl a blushing but full acknowledgment of the situation of her heart. He listened to the delightful confession with ecstasy; but the privilege enjoyed by the lowest of his subjects was prohibited to the head of the German Empire, and the amiable Monarch deeply sighed as he recollected that his hand was not at his own disposal. Some weeks elapsed, however, after this explanation, in the mutual indulgence of a virtuous and honourable passion. The Castle of d'Alembert was in the immediate vicinity of Vienna, and there the Emperor spent every moment of leisure he could possibly command from affairs of Government and national concern.

“ Accustomed to see their Sovereign unattended, and rambling about at pleasure, amongst the fine seats in the neighbourhood, acquainted with his aversion to ceremony or intrusion, and gratified by the condescending notice he took of all ranks who happened to come in his way, no person wished to incur the displeasure of their beloved Prince by impertinently prying into any of his private actions; he therefore generally found

himself at liberty, when public business permitted, to follow, unobserved, the natural bent of his inclination; and that inclination led him almost invariably to the Castle or woods of d'Alembert.

“ Thus accustomed to see him daily, and daily sensible of his increasing progress in her affections, convinced too that the power, rather than the will, was wanting to make her legally his at the altar, and gradually overcome by the strong yet delicate light in which he continually expressed his sufferings from that inability, poor Victorine imperceptibly became the victim of her own tenderness; and, forgetting the line of conduct she had formerly marked out for herself, unhappily found her claim to the name of a mother take place before she was entitled to assume that of a wife. She lived to give birth to a beautiful female infant, and died of a broken heart in the second year of its existence!

“ The Emperor was a sincere mourner on the occasion; he truly loved the unfortunate Victorine, and felt the deepest regret for her loss. The smiling little cherub she had left, became doubly dear to his heart, and he determined, if possible, to indemnify the child for the deprivation it had suffered, by every practicable instance of paternal tenderness. She was committed to the care of the Baroness d'Alembert, who, anxious to save the

memory of her young friend from that censure which such a proof of frailty must indelibly impress upon it, should the suspicions latterly afloat acquire any degree of stability by the slightest chance of confirmation, carried her to Paris, whither Madame was under the necessity of accompanying her husband on some affairs of a political nature.

“ Placed in early youth in a situation to enjoy the advantages of a superior education, and profiting by those advantages in a very unusual manner, the little Victorine soon became no less conspicuous for mental than personal qualifications; she even surpassed, in elegance of form, and symmetry of features, her unfortunate but once lovely mother; to whom, and her Imperial father, she bore a striking resemblance.

“ To be exempt from misfortune was not, however, to prove the portion of this young and innocent girl, any more than that of her hapless parent. The Baron d’Alembert met with an accident from an unruly horse, which terminated his existence in this world; and his Lady, who was fondly attached to him, did not long survive the fatal event. On her death-bed she entrusted the care of her youthful charge to Madame de Mercour, from whom was exacted a most solemn and binding

binding promise never to desert her in any exigency whatever; and delivering to her two letters, one for the Emperor, the other for the unfortunate Maria Antoinette, the Baroness expired, praying blessings on her head, in proportion as she shewed attention and tenderness to the daughter of her deceased friend and relation, for whom, in spite of her errors, she ever retained the warmest affection.

“ The epistle addressed for the Queen was enclosed in a cover to Magdeleine, in which the latter was desired to retain it in her own hand till the pleasure of the Emperor was made known to her. This envelope likewise contained several other directions connected with the guardianship she had now undertaken, and a short but pathetic note to the weeping Victorine, exhorting her to a steadfast continuance in the paths of religion and virtue, and a request to pay implicit obedience to the wishes of Madame de Mercour, whom she was henceforth to regard in the light of the nominal parent, who was now bidding her an eternal adieu.

“ In the course of the following week Magdeleine received the expected directions from the Court of Germany. The Emperor desired she would immediately wait upon the Queen, his sister, and present the letter he then enclosed for her

her Majesty, with that addressed to her by Madame d'Alembert. The contents of these packets visibly affected the noble personage who perused them; and they were no sooner concluded, than Magdeleine was commanded to introduce her ward to her Majesty's knowledge, who soon became so prepossessed in the lovely girl's favour, that she was seldom permitted to be long absent from her presence.

“ This predilection of the Queen for Victorine, was particularly gratifying to the Emperor at the present juncture; for the political situation of State affairs in Germany was now in so critical and fluctuating a condition, that he felt extremely averse to remove her from France; of course the patronage of his illustrious sister proved a most desirable event. Magdeleine, however, still retained nearly the same post assigned her by the deceased Baroness; but on account of some domestic arrangements made by that lady, was once more under the necessity of returning to Germany. Upon her re-appearance in Paris, an additional appointment, of a more lucrative nature, was conferred upon her, which requiring constant attendance at Court, deprived me of the pleasure I had hitherto enjoyed in her society; but I considered the probable advantages of which it was likely to be productive,

productive, and therefore endeavoured to suppress all selfish repinings.

“ Of the fatal occurrences that afterwards succeeded, I need not speak ; their history is written in letters of blood and horror, unhappily too legible to be easily forgotten. The unfortunate Queen, in her last interview with Madame Elizabeth, committed to her care the orphan daughter of her Imperial brother ; solemnly enjoining the Princess to shield her, if possible, from danger, and through every vicissitude of life, to consider her safety as nearly of equal importance with that of the royal children of France. Madame de Mercour, who had now been some time a widow, shared the fate of the other members of the Queen’s household, and was long separated from her young charge ; but though partly ignorant of poor Victorine’s situation, she contrived to elude the vigilance of the miscreants who surrounded her, and procured herself a place of concealment, from whence she hoped to open a mode of communication with the hapless remnant of Royalty then immured in the Temple. She therefore kept a watchful eye on every incident within the circle of her knowledge, fully prepared to take hold of the first favourable one that presented itself for their service. However, notwithstanding this determination,

determination, she trembled not less at every rumour of a fresh commotion, for the safety of the innocent Victorine, whose striking resemblance to the House of Austria had for some time rendered her an object of particular dislike and suspicion to the unprincipled wretches who now ruled France with an iron sceptre, several of whom came nearer the truth than they themselves were even aware of at the time; for though various surmises were formed respecting her birth and real situation in life, all generally agreed in one final conclusion of her consanguinity to the Queen's family, and on that account appeared eager to insult and mortify her on every possible occasion: consequently she had much to fear from the mean malignity of her unprovoked enemies, should the place of her concealment happen to be discovered by them.

“ About this period a few of the most humane and moderate Members of the Convention, (shocked at the sanguinary measures to which they had been forced by their colleagues, and when time, with returning reason, should introduce a milder and more equitable form of government, anxious probably to have something they might then congratulate themselves upon, as having been the means of saving their deluded countrymen from the further effusion of royal blood,

blood, and the commission of another great national enormity), came to a secret resolution amongst themselves to preserve, if possible, the virtuous and blameless life of Madame Elizabeth from the hand of the executioner, yet reeking with the vital stream of her family. Magdeleine and M. de St. Clare, brother to her late husband, were both well acquainted with her merit and amiable qualities, and entered of course enthusiastically into this measure.

“The latter, in hopes of being one day more effectually enabled to render her some essential service, had renounced every outward indication of Nobility, and to all appearance was become a thorough Democrat in sentiment and manners. Nothing was in fact, however, farther from his intentions; but the deception was founded on a laudable principle, and proved ultimately useful.

“Acquainted with Madame de Mercour’s place of concealment, he held frequent consultations with her on the subject, in which they were almost equally interested. St. Clare’s talents were of a first rate description; he was not usually long in discovering what seemed necessary to be known; and when known, speedily knew how to turn it to the best advantage. Of course he, and the members already mentioned, soon came to a
right

right understanding ;—but the final magnitude of our intentions seldom appear at first, even to ourselves on such occasions. To liberate Madame Elizabeth, and convey her to a place of safety, was the utmost extent of the service they meditated to render her in the early stages of the undertaking ; by degrees a more copious field of action opened to their view, and the resolution was at length formed of seating her on the throne of her brother ; under restrictions, however, which they flattered themselves would be acceptable to all parties, by the aid of a little adroit management.

“ To accomplish the emancipation of the Princess, was a previous step, however, of the greatest consequence. Should their scheme transpire, in the smallest degree, before that was effected, her life would probably fall a sacrifice to the vengeance or fears of the barbarians who then governed the movements of the Temple. This, therefore, was an affair which demanded the most serious consideration ; and a circumstance accidentally occurred which seconded their views beyond the extent of what they durst once have flattered themselves with.

“ While different plans were in agitation on this subject, chance conducted one of the confederates to the only spot where he would probably
have

have been so fortunate as to meet with the very incident apparently best calculated for the execution of their design.

“ In the prison of the Abbaye, which this gentleman had entered *en passant*, merely from a vague motive of curiosity, was observed a young woman, who in stature, features, air, and general appearance, so perfectly resembled Madame Elizabeth, that instant astonishment seized every faculty, and fixed him to the place he stood upon. While his eyes were thus rivetted intently on her countenance in silent wonder, he could scarcely persuade himself there was any mistake in the case, and almost became convinced the unhappy Princess had been recently transferred to this wretched abode of complicated misery. Determined, however, to ascertain the real cause of an occurrence so inexplicable, he approached the gloomy grated window where she was seated, and under some plausible pretence or other, contrived to engage her in conversation. The tones of her voice he now perceived were rather dissimilar to those of Madame; and on a nearer investigation of her features, the likeness, so striking at a little distance, seemed less strong, yet still sufficiently powerful to make it difficult to distinguish the one from the other, when separate, particularly in the eyes of
those

those not intimately acquainted with either, or viewing them only in a cursory manner. Similitudes of this nature no doubt often happen; but it is merely in situations, or times like the present, in which they chance to be particularly remarked, or of material consequence to the possessors.

“ During the discourse which took place between the prisoner and her inquisitive visiter, she informed him that, being of aristocratical principles, she wished to make her escape from the kingdom, but the attempt was twice frustrated; once by the very identical resemblance he mentioned, which had in fact given birth to a suspicion that she really was the Princess endeavouring to get away in disguise; the second time from a notion of her holding a secret communication with some of the emigrants, who, it was supposed, had received very material intelligence through her means. She added that, young as she certainly was, a train of calamity had pursued her from the earliest period of her remembrance, which at last rendered existence a burthen almost too heavy for her shoulders to support any longer; and therefore the fate which now indisputably awaited her, brought no terrors to appal her mind, but, on the contrary was become an object of the utmost indifference in every point of view.

“ Her

“ Her companion here interrupted her with expressions of hope for a more favourable termination to her present troubles; but such ideas appeared to be no longer cherished by the hapless captive: she seemed not even, indeed, to desire a change of circumstances. All her family and friends, she said, had already been massacred before her eyes, and the most ardent wish of her heart was to join them beyond the reach of human vicissitudes, or the bloodthirsty villains who would soon sign her passport to eternity! The commission of what was called crimes in the Republican vocabulary, had been fully proved against her; her life, she knew, was therefore forfeited: it was a debt mortality must sooner or later pay, and a few days more or less were of little importance to one who, like her, viewed the approach of death as the final close of sorrow. All she regretted was the inability of making her last hours serviceable to the cause for which she expected to suffer; assured that circumstance was in her power, she would rejoice in the prospect, nor wish to exchange situations with the first person in the Republic.”—

“ My God!” exclaimed Charlotte, raising her clasped hands, and interrupting the Countess with energy, “ my God! how I envy that woman her magnanimous sentiments! How poor seems the triumph

triumph of human revenge over souls composed of such materials!—But I ask pardon, my dear Madame, for this involuntary intrusion.—Pray proceed; I am extremely anxious to learn what followed.”

“ Their further conversation at this period,” resumed Madame de Narbonne, “ was suddenly interrupted by the unexpected appearance of that detestable wretch, Marat, whose very name invariably makes me tremble! He seemed to approach with the diabolical intention of glutting his depraved heart with the contemplation of those miseries to which he had himself so considerably contributed. The hapless beings, who were forced to suffer his presence in silence, shuddered as he advanced, and crowded into the most distant corner of the prison, eager to escape his notice; every glance he threw around was looked upon as a sentence of death, and where it rested, appeared to say, “ Your turn is at hand!!!”—The prototype of Madame Elizabeth alone seemed to possess herself in the general trepidation; firm and unmoved, she kept her station; and while contemptuous indignation flashed from her eyes, as they followed the steps of the bloody tyrant, a ray of something more than mortal illumined her expressive countenance, and
bespoke

bespoke her superior to the future chances or changes of the world.

“ Mavillon again gazed upon her with increasing astonishment; the resemblance which had already struck him in so forcible a manner, gained additional strength; while the calm fortitude she evinced, united to the most captivating but majestic air, indicated her mind above the level of her fellow-sufferers. The momentary contemplation that this lovely woman’s *tout ensemble* afforded, recalled once more those ideas her visiter had cherished on his first entrance; and he half persuaded himself that any discoverable difference between the Princess and her was more the effect of intentional disguise, adopted to mislead suspicion, than traits of the natural character. But his observations were no longer permitted at this juncture; he was warned to make a timely retreat before the infamous Marat returned from the other end of the prison, where he was coolly numbering his succeeding victims, and retired accordingly.

“ On departing from the gloomy confines of this antichamber to the grave, Mavillon perceived St. Clare on the opposite side of the street, and hastened to join him. To him the recent occurrence was related as an incident of an extraordinary nature; he even let some hints of
returning

returning incredulity escape, adding—‘ If it is really Madame Elizabeth I have seen, her fate is inevitable, and our late formed project in her favour of course falls to the ground.’—At this moment their attention was caught by the hoarse, discordant sound of the heavy gates of the Abbaye, and two persons appeared slowly advancing from the interior of the building. St. Clare and his companion stepped a few paces aside, and taking their station under the porch of an old ruinous house, from whence they could observe what passed, without subjecting themselves to the danger of discovery, soon ascertained the objects of their curiosity to be Marat, accompanied by a well-known ferocious looking ruffian, who had often been remarked for practising the most infernal atrocities during the term of existing commotion; they stopped at intervals as they approached, and seemed deeply engaged in earnest conversation.

“ The two gentlemen observed a profound silence while this scene lasted, and instinctively shuddered as they reflected on the too probable tenor of the conference. The discourse which afterwards succeeded was such as naturally flowed from the present frame of their thoughts; they dwelt on the difficulties with which they would

themselves have to struggle in the execution of their project; the fresh streams of blood that might possibly be shed in the course of the undertaking; the variety of opinions to be combated even in their own circle, where many of the members still remained undecided on several of the most material points; and, after all, the uncertainty of success attending their labours with the Princess herself, whose mild, unambitious mind would, perhaps, revolt against mounting a throne where no female had hitherto been seated, and which was yet reeking with the blood of an amiable and beloved brother.

“ The latter supposition appeared but too well founded. On entering the place appropriated to the secret meetings of the members, they were given to understand that a proposition to the last-mentioned effect had been hinted, at second hand, to Madame, who received it without the smallest indication of approbation, and indeed in such a manner as almost admitted of a doubt whether or not their meaning had been sufficiently comprehended by her; but the mode of communication was too difficult, and liable to the danger of discovery for allowing of an unambiguous explanation at the time. They flattered themselves, however, with being able to manage this matter
more

more explicitly on a future occasion; and a suffrage of votes appearing in favour of the scheme, they concluded the sitting of the evening with a resolution to proceed in the undertaking, in the same manner as if Madame Elizabeth had openly acceded to their wishes.

CHAP. XV.

“ Blessed are those
“ Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,
“ That they are not a pipe for Fortune’s finger,
“ To sound what stop she please.”

SHAKESPEARE.

“ ANTECEDENT to the immediate commencement of any great undertaking, the mental faculties are generally too much absorbed in thought to admit of that degree of repose usually enjoyed in the common rotation of human arrangements.

“ St. Clare passed the remainder of this night in restless agitation, alternately forming and rejecting a thousand different projects as they presented themselves in succession to view. Weary, and at length hopeless of obtaining any respite from the fatiguing train of reflection which entirely occupied

occupied his mind, and banished all expectation of sleep, he left his chamber at an early hour, and repaired to the gardens of the Thuilleries. There, after some time had elapsed in solitary meditation, he was joined again by Mavillon, whose rest had likewise been disturbed by similar ideas, strengthened with a recollection of the threatening and sanguinary aspect of Marat, whose parting look, as he retired from the Abbaye on the foregoing evening, seemed to seal the final destiny of its unfortunate inhabitants.

“ Mavillon was possessed of much sensibility, and he dwelt upon the pictured horrors of imagination with energy. The approaching probable fate of the fair and unfortunate prisoner with whom he had recently conversed, particularly interested his feelings, and engaged him a second time in expatiating on the extraordinary similitude she evidently bore to the object of their present consultations—the good and amiable Madame Elizabeth.

‘ Come,’ cried St. Clare, suddenly rousing himself from a deep reverie, and taking his companion hastily by the arm, ‘ lead me to this uncommon female, whom, it is plain to see, you suspect to be superior to her present appearance and situation.—Heavens!’ he continued, in a voice of increasing agitation, ‘ should your supposition

be verified, what horrid enormities will not France have still to blush for !'

" They entered the gates of the Abbaye as he spoke, and speedily made their way to the interior of the prison. Bertha (for so she named herself) was stationed at her usual place in the window, and received her late-formed acquaintance with a faint smile of pleasure. St. Clare was startled at his first approach, and eyed her with a scrutinizing look; but the Princess was better known to him than Mavillon, who had only seen her at a distance in public, and he was quickly convinced of his friend's mistake as to the identifying her person; but though clearly persuaded of this circumstance, the resemblance was nevertheless sufficiently powerful, even in his opinion, to deceive those not too minutely nice in the science of observation, and therefore the error was excusable.

" A thought had occurred on this topic while Mavillon was speaking, in their way to the Abbaye, which acquired strength in proportion as St. Clare meditated upon its practicability, and remarked the mental superiority of her on whom its success finally rested. To ascertain the basis of this idea, after some preparatory discourse, he proceeded to find the prisoner, and found her possessed of
magnanimity

magnanimity fully equal to his most sanguine expectation.

“ The embryo plan which is here alluded to, was nothing less than substituting her in the place of Madame, and by this means contriving to effect that lady’s escape.

“ The generous Bertha heard this proposal with apparent firmness; and glorying in the idea of suffering for such a cause, agreed to it with avidity. She knew that the joint lives of herself and her fellow-prisoners were hastening to a speedy conclusion, and seemed to be inconceivably gratified by the reflection that the closing act of her’s would be thus rendered beneficial to the good of her country, and justly entitled to the plaudits of posterity. Seasons of danger and difficulty are the periods for great minds to display all their energies. This woman, when ancient Rome was at its highest summit of grandeur, would probably have been considered as a fit subject for deification after death, and been honoured with altars erected to her memory, while her worshippers represented her as an example worthy of imitation to the most distant ages.”

“ And she well merited such a distinction,” cried Charlotte, her fine eyes sparkling with the enthusiasm of animated emulation. “ How do I

constantly feel myself inferior to the characters that surround me!" continued she; "I who have, in a manner, dreamed through life, without hitherto possessing an opportunity of performing one meritorious action above the common herd of vulgar attainment, and may probably finish the closing scene in the same insignificant style!"

"We know not," replied the Countess, "what our closing scene may produce; it is our business, in the meantime, to repress the suggestions of impatience, and encourage submission to the existing allotments of Providence, which will undoubtedly place us in that situation, and under those circumstances fittest for us to experience. This doctrine is at least necessary for me to inculcate, since, under a different view of the case, my present state of trial would be too insupportable for endurance.

"Before Bertha and her two friends separated, she besought their attention in behalf of a young and beautiful girl, recently committed to the prison of the Abbaye, in whose fate she found herself particularly interested. She then turned to a small door in the vicinity of the window, opened it, and displayed a space of a few feet square, where a female figure, of uncommon elegance, appeared seated near a rough stone table, on which she leant, with a book in her hand. At their appearance she started,
and

and raising her eyes, regarded them for a moment with a look of the most fascinating sweetness and mild dignity—‘ Ah, Bertha!’ said she, ‘ is it you?’ and deeply sighing, resumed her former posture without indicating the smallest knowledge of any other visiter.

“ Bertha, however, soon recalled her attention to the two gentlemen, while a rosy red suffused her lovely cheeks as she apologized for her heedlessness, and rose from her seat to receive their compliments with an air of ineffable, unassuming majesty, which they had seldom seen equalled. The book she had been reading, lay open upon the table—St. Clare glanced his eye over it, and speedily perceived it was Plato’s *Phædon*, where

——“ Dying Socrates takes leave of life

“ With such an easy, careless, calm indifference,

“ As if the trifle were of no account,

“ Mean in itself, and only to be worn

“ In honour of the giver.*”

‘ Alas!’ sighed M. St. Clare, observing her with a look of infinite pity, as he closed the book,

* Rowe.

‘ so young, and yet so deep a philosopher !—Your studies are of a serious nature, Mademoiselle ?’

‘ Yes,’ replied she, with a faint but enchanting smile, ‘ the study of death is indeed a serious one, and therefore best adapted to those who are upon the point of proving the practical part of it !’

“ St. Clare groaned, and an exclamation of indignant reprobation burst from the quivering lips of Mavillon.

“ Bertha besought them to conduct themselves with caution, while the interesting disciple of Plato followed the former to the high grated window, whither he had retired to conceal emotions nearly too powerful for suppression. She talked to him with the mild, insinuating eloquence of a celestial being ; and shewed, by the tenor of her discourse, that the precepts of her author, and the example of Bertha, had not been thrown away upon her. Her visitors listened with a painful sensation of mingled astonishment and pleasure, secretly vowing to save her at the risk of their own lives : but the few words that unconsciously escaped them to that purport, made no alteration in her countenance ; there a firm but resigned expression evinced the mind it belonged to superior to the hopes or fears of mortality.

“ One favour, nevertheless, she requested of them,

them, as the last charitable service they could perform to the dying; it was to deliver a paper, which she now produced, to the person for whom it was addressed. St. Clare looked at the superscription; he perceived it was for Madame Elizabeth, and placing it next his heart, swore to perform her request, or expire in the attempt. She thanked him in the sweetest accents of gratitude, after which expressing a wish to be once more alone, the two gentlemen bowed, and retired with Bertha.

“Of their remaining female companion they now eagerly required some satisfactory particulars relative to the lovely captive they had just quitted: her intelligence on the subject was, however, of a limited nature. Mademoiselle, she said, had been brought, it was understood, from a place of concealment in the neighbourhood of Paris, and conducted by the bloodhounds of Government to her present situation, on the evening prior to Mavillon’s first appearance in the Abbaye; that her youth, her beauty, and uncommon merit had early attracted her (Bertha’s) notice, and produced an ardent desire to attempt the mitigation of those sorrows with which she seemed to be oppressed:—happily her endeavours proved successful, and she had the satisfaction of seeing her young scholar

restored to a comparative degree of composure, and prepared to adopt the example of her teacher.

“ A long conversation between the two gentlemen and Bertha now took place on the topic of their future arrangements; to which they had scarcely given a temporary form, before the last bell for the dismissal of strangers sullenly tolled from the frowning battlements. They hastily bade her adieu, and departed, to systemize the plan with the rest of their colleagues.

“ Several of the members, who had come to the resolution of procuring Madame’s deliverance from captivity, possessed a considerable degree of influence in the general assembly of the nation; a circumstance that facilitated their measures with more ease and safety than could otherwise have happened amidst the difficulties they had to encounter.

“ Though there were still some amongst the number who hesitated upon the propriety of offering the crown to a woman, and urged the prior claim of the Dauphin, yet the necessity of seating a person, come to mature years, on the throne, and one so unexceptionable in every other point of view as the Princess Elizabeth, particularly as they seemed unanimous in rejecting all idea of raising either of her brothers to that dangerous pre-eminence,

pre-eminence, at length determined their choice; and they agreed to meet on the following night to consult on taking the proper measures for acquainting Madame with this resolution in her favour.

“ Affairs were come to this crisis when St. Clare contrived to get the letter, entrusted to his care in the prison of the Abbaye, forwarded to the Princess. It was from Victorine, and the contents overwhelmed her with anguish. She had hitherto reason to imagine her placed in safety near the metropolis; but though acquainted with the particular spot of her concealment, yet apprehensive of danger from any accidental discovery, originating in the difficulty of procuring modes of communication to be depended upon, Madame had not ventured upon the *minutiæ* of information to Magdeleine, nor even risked mentioning the name of the generous friend who preserved the dear girl from destruction during the general confusion on the fatal 10th of August. Madame de Mercour merely knew from the Princess that Victorine was supposed to be in a situation of tolerable security; but that a desire for further knowledge, the smallest incautious proceeding in the attainment of it, or any other error whatever on the occasion, would probably make the enquiry end in the most disastrous manner. Convinced of this fact from
more

more circumstances than one, Magdeleine endeavoured to restrain her impatience, and kept herself in constant readiness to answer the call of any sudden emergency.

“ Thus perfectly assured that no imprudent action of her own had unhappily contributed to the acceleration of the event she deplored, and ignorant of the means by which it was effected, Madame trembled lest the consequences should be more dreadfully diffusive than she was at present aware of; and therefore, sensible that the former motives for secrecy and caution were partly at an end, and in some measure, indeed, no longer existed, she hastily dispatched a confused but energetic note to Magdeleine, deeply expressive of the keenest distress; imploring instant attention to the poor prisoner, and beseeching her to use every possible exertion for her immediate emancipation from the horrors of captivity in the walls of the Abbaye: after which, if it was practicable to be accomplished, she signified a wish to have her either conveyed to Germany, or concealed in some place of probable security, at a distance from the capital.

“ To explain the cause of this urgency, and enforce a speedy compliance with her request, the Princess concluded by hinting her fears of an
5 impending

impending commotion, which she had been given to understand was in contemplation; and from the consequences of such an occurrence, she well knew the wretched inhabitants of the different prisons in Paris had every thing dreadful to apprehend that human depravity could inflict on the defenceless with impunity.

“ Suggestions, or motives of this nature, were unnecessary to interest the feelings of Magdeleine on such an occasion; her heart proved ever sufficiently alive to the finer sensations of humanity, but in the present instance more than usually so, and required no stimulus to action beyond a knowledge of the particular quarter in which her activity could be rendered serviceable, and her exertions properly applied.

“ It was already settled by the friends of the intended revolution, that after freeing her from the Temple, it would be requisite to place Madame in some secure retreat, from whence she could be conducted with facility when her purposed elevation to the throne was fully ripe for execution. St. Clare, and the other conspirators, held several conferences on this subject, without being able to fix on a spot suitable to their views. The various sentiments these consultations continually gave rise to, happened afterwards

wards to be repeated in a subsequent conversation with Magdeleine; who recollecting the Rock of Narbonne, immediately conceived it to be the very identical situation for their purpose. Under this impression St. Clare, who had long been acquainted with the existence of such a retreat, though ignorant of its extensive utility, was informed of the idea that had struck her, and partially told of the advantages to be derived from it; respecting which, having fully coincided in opinion, a solemn oath of secrecy was afterwards administered, and proper directions given for his future proceedings. In the course of this business, however, every particular piece of intelligence, not absolutely necessary to be divulged, was carefully retained in her own bosom; thus preserving in *our* mutual possession the ability of limiting or enlarging the power of assisting others, as the urgency of the case seemed to merit.

“ In this manner, endowed with proper credentials to render the cause important service, he mentioned the general nature of his proposal, without entering upon the *minutiæ* of it, and pledged himself for the forthcoming and safety of the Princess, if entrusted to his protection. The honour and moral integrity of St. Clare were too well established in the minds of his colleagues to admit
of

of hesitation; and the proposition was consequently acceded to on certain conditions, with which he instantly agreed to comply. This matter being now finally settled, the members of the meeting dispersed, to prepare for the different parts they had undertaken to perform.

“ That no plausible reason might remain to justify Madame in a rejection of their proposals, the conspirators had previously agreed to conceal the result of their consultations from her knowledge, till such time as every thing was put in a positive state of adjustment for the ultimate completion of the scheme. Magdeleine, in consequence of this resolution, was therefore directed to request my immediate presence in the metropolis, lest any intervening incident should render it impossible, or even difficult, for her to prove mutually serviceable, at a juncture alike critical to the Princess and Victorine, whom it was also intended to liberate, and conduct to Narbonne at the same time.

“ From the nature of this arrangement proceeded the hasty and urgent summons forwarded to me by Madame de Mercour; and to my unfortunate compliance with it, are to be ascribed the subsequent miseries I have endured!

“ Such was the situation of affairs on my
arrival

arrival in Paris, as detailed in the course of conversation by St. Clare and Magdeleine.

“ On the following day after I reached it, a report was industriously circulated of Madame’s having been decoyed from the Temple, and confined in the Abbaye. Those in the secret (who still retained their former stations in the National Assembly), proposed to examine into the truth of this rumour, and artfully procured their own appointment for that purpose.

“ The evening was fixed upon for the investigation; and as a part of the conspirators were to repair both to the Temple and the Abbaye, it was not doubted but an exchange of prisoners might easily be effected, and the place of the Princess supplied by Bertha, whose escape from the Abbaye in that case would be difficult to trace, and any chance of discovery, for some time at least, rendered abortive.

“ So far all the preconcerted plans had proved successful, and Fortune favoured their views in an uncommon degree. Some little failure in judgment, some trifling omission in practice, frequently, however, render the best formed schemes ineffectual, and disconcert the wisest precautions of human ability. To keep the Princess unacquainted with the extent of their intentions in her
favour,

favour, till the moment of putting them in execution, had been generally considered as a measure of true policy. A proper degree of reflection might have shewn them the dangerous tendency of such a mode of conduct; and practical experience, which is commonly purchased at a much dearer rate than reflection, speedily fixed it on their memory in characters of the deepest disappointment.

CHAP. XVI.

- “ Where are the ancient honours of the realm?
“ The Nobles with the mitred Fathers join’d?
“ The wealthy Commons solemnly assembled?
“ Where is that voice of a consenting people,
“ To pledge the universal faith with mine,
“ And call me justly, Queen?”

ROWE.

“ THE principal object of their labours and anxieties being apparently so near a close, entertaining little apprehension of a happy termination to them, and elated with ideas of the supposed conspicuous part they had hereafter to perform under the auspices of an indulgent and grateful Sovereign, who would be indebted for the crown she wore, and the very throne she was placed upon, to their generous exertions in her favour; the conspirators, entrusted

entrusted with the care of examining the prisoners in the Temple, admitted not the smallest doubt of the Princess Elizabeth's ready and joyful acquiescence with their views—views so evidently advantageous to her probable safety and interest, that the possibility of a moment's hesitation on her side, never once occurred to them. But they were unacquainted with the steady, equitable, heroic, and noble mind of this charming woman; and judging of her sentiments by what their own would have been on a familiar occasion, (a plausible mode of reasoning indeed, but not always infallible), had not properly estimated the value of a character so infinitely superior to the generality of those with whom they usually associated.

“ St. Clare and Mavillon possessed too much sense and moderation not to see with regret the ill-timed security of their colleagues, and prudently endeavoured to check the presumptuous suggestions of expectation, inflated by foregoing success; but their expostulations were listened to with impatience, and answered in querulous accents of petulancy or ridicule. They saw it was in vain to exert the powers of reasoning or admonition, where there visibly appeared a predetermined resolution to resist their influence; and therefore wisely forbore to contend on a subject
in

in which unanimity of conduct was of the utmost consequence, and dissension might be attended with more evil effects than acquiescence.

“ Their opponents, however, were soon experimentally convinced of their error; and did justice to that superior degree of foresight and penetration which they had formerly treated with unmerited derision, when it was unfortunately become too late to profit by their assistance.

“ Though ignorant of the purposed elevation which apparently waited her acceptance, the Princess had for some time been informed of their intentions to effect her liberty; and attaching to this knowledge certain resolutions, which were strongly impressed on her benevolent mind, had frequently learned the progressive success of the conspirators with an ardent but secret degree of satisfaction, the extent of which she confined to her own bosom. Perceiving, however, that the period was at length arrived when her views had a prospect of being realized, she answered their flattering propositions with expressions of the warmest gratitude, and declared her immediate acquiescence in the plan they had formed for her escape, provided two conditions were acceded to, the visible reasonableness of which she doubted not would secure their unhesitating suffrage; and without a
compliance

compliance with which, her ultimate determination to remain in a state of hopeless captivity, was irrevocably fixed. In short, her unfortunate brother's children, the Royal infants of France, must be emancipated at the same time; and the noble-minded Bertha, who had volunteered her life in the cause, secured from the too probable consequences of such uncommon generosity. Without this request was unequivocally agreed to, and the essence of it religiously performed, Madame Elizabeth repeated her former resolution of sharing the fate of the illustrious orphans, whether that fate was to be terminated in a dungeon, or by the hand of the public executioner.

“ Hitherto the conspirators had not proposed to make Madame acquainted with their future intention of raising her to the throne, till they had effected her escape from the Temple, and lodged her in a place of safety. But disconcerted and astonished at a proposal so unexpected, so inimical, indeed, in some of its parts, to the very nature of their design, they at length disclosed the future extent of their scheme, as an unanswerable motive for unconditional compliance, after having ineffectually urged every other argument for the purpose that could possibly be brought in as auxiliary aid on the occasion.

“ This

“ This intelligence, however, which, with characters of a less noble description, would probably have turned the scale against natural affection in favour of ambition, had exactly a contrary effect in the present instance, and produced consequences very different from the ostensible cause of its disclosure. It determined the Princess at once how to proceed, and she peremptorily refused her assent to a proposition so detrimental, in every future stage of it, to the interests of him whom she now considered as her Sovereign, and the successor of the unfortunate Louis XVI. His prior claim, she energetically protested, should never be infringed by her, whatever might be the evils entailed on herself by such a resolution.—In vain were represented the early years, and consequent immature judgment of the young Prince for a charge of such importance, in times so critically situated as those which now existed; in vain were enumerated the various prejudices harboured against him on his unfortunate mother’s account, and the almost certain risk he encountered by attempting to assume the regal dignity in opposition to the wishes of the nation, with a thousand other arguments calculated to coincide with their wishes ! To persuasion she was deaf, to entreaty inflexible. The period of their visit to the Temple

was

was wasted in useless altercation, and they found themselves necessitated to retire for the present without being able to obtain one concession in their favour, or approaching, in a single degree, nearer that object, for the accomplishment of which they had previously taken so much trouble.

“ During this tedious interval, expectation with me had been wound up to the highest pitch of anxiety, and suspense became painful in the extreme. I started from my seat at every passing sound, and again returned from the window equally agitated and alarmed.

“ From an idea that travelling in too great a number would probably attract inconvenient observation, and be attended with disagreeable circumstances to people in our situation, a separate and circuitous route had been marked out for the fugitives, with their respective conductors. My directions were, to hold myself in immediate preparation for accompanying the Princess to Narbonne, under the escort of M. St. Clare, while Magdeleine performed the same office to Victorine and Bertha, for whose appearance she waited in an adjoining street, with a degree of solicitude equal, no doubt, to my own.

“ At length I heard a person ascending the staircase.—St. Clare entered with disappointment

visibly written on every feature, and the result of their unsuccessful negociation was in due time made known to me. A second trial of skill, however, was to be attempted with the Princess, and my departure from Paris consequently postponed till the issue of it was fully ascertained.

“ While St. Clare yet spoke, a gloomy and oppressive presentiment of impending evil took possession of my mind, and absorbed every mental faculty in a reverie so intensely profound, that I no longer heard his voice, till suddenly roused by the approach of a hasty step, near the landing place, at the top of the stairs. Almost in the next moment the door was thrown open with violence, and Mavillon (who had early left the Temple, and repaired to the Abbaye) stood before me! Agitation, perplexity, and horror sat pictured on his pallid countenance, and for a dreadful instant deprived him of ability to explain himself, or account for his present emotion. I sprung from my seat in breathless terror, seized his arm with a convulsive grasp, and entreated to hear the worst.— ‘ Magdeleine!’ I wildly exclaimed—‘ my dear, my affectionate Madame de Mercour——’ ‘ Is safe,’ replied he, interrupting me, in a voice of assumed composure; ‘ and now, I trust, accompanying the young prisoner of the Abbaye to the place of her appointed

appointed retreat; but Bertha, the noble-minded Bertha, on whose preservation hung eventually that of the Princess, is no more! It was found impracticable to liberate that superior woman without endangering the freedom of Victorine, and she fell a victim to the disinterestedness of character which so eminently distinguished her!

“ He then proceeded to inform us that, while one of the party was shewing a fictitious passport, counterfeited for the purpose of liberating the two female prisoners, an alarm was given of a counter-revolution. The gates of the Abbaye were burst open; Marat’s portentous visit was upon the point of exhibiting its consequences; an indiscriminate crowd of ruffians rushed forward to the interior of the building, with the intention, no doubt, of perpetrating their usual enormities, and bathing their hands in human blood.

“ To escape as speedily as possible, was now the only remaining chance of saving themselves from immediate destruction. Mavillon seized Victorine by the arm, while another of his companions took hold of Bertha, and endeavoured to regain the entrance before it was too late. In spite of their united efforts, however, the multitude, who were now within the courts of the prison, met them at the porch, and for some

moments they gave themselves up for lost! In vain were their passports, with the ostensible signature of the Minister appointed for that department, shewn.—A mob reasons not—it only acts; their will was despotic, and obedience, the sole alternative, left; of course to submit proved necessary, however hard the conditions imposed upon them; and they were hard! With the usual caprice which generally predominates on similar occasions, these unfeeling wretches would not permit more than one of the females to accompany their conductors. The affecting contest this resolution produced between the two amiable women was excruciating; but little time remained for its decision. Bertha positively refused to move. The period was critical, and further delay would have brought certain destruction on the whole party. The weeping and reluctant Victorine was therefore speedily separated from her late fellow-prisoner; and poor Bertha, by the imperious call of necessity, consigned to her fate! The former soon found herself in the arms of Madame de Mercour, and Mavillon saw them out of the city in safety.

“ Scarcely had the relator concluded the foregoing particulars, when the deathlike toll of the prophetic tocsin broke upon our ears; the drum beat to arms, and the sound of the outrageous multitude,

multitude, passing to and fro, reached us in every direction from the street;—it advanced nearer; I trembled; my head grew giddy; I gasped for breath!—The door of the house was burst open, with loud and fearful imprecations of vengeance. I attempted to rise; my feet refused their office; I sunk again into my chair; my half-closing eyes glanced upon a blood-stained villain, whose reeking sword was unsheathed, and ready for destruction!—I saw no more! terror came to my relief, and happily rendered me insensible for the present to the horrors of further observation.”

CHAP. XVII.

“ Thou hast abjur’d mankind,
“ Dash’d safety from thy bleak, unsocial side,
“ And wag’d wild war with universal nature.”

BROOKE.

“ I’ll woo her as the lion woos his bride.”

HOME.

MADAME de Narbonne was too much agitated at the end of the last sentence to proceed for some time; she seemed to experience sensations similar to those described at the close of the foregoing chapter, and for several minutes gave way to their violence. The relief afforded by nature to the overburthened heart, proves more efficaciously beneficial in the first burst of grief, than all the theoretical dissertations on the proper government of

of the passions, that were ever promulgated in the true *nonchalance* spirit of unfeeling consolation.

Charlotte knew and allowed the justness of this axiom; the tears of Madame de Narbonne were therefore permitted to flow for some time, untormented by the common-place sentences of misnamed comfort, which are apt to intrude so officiously on the deep and sacred sorrows of the unfortunate.

At length she ventured to request a continuance of the melancholy story, expressing the anxiety she experienced to be relieved from the horrid train of appalling images, which Madame's last words placed in frightful array before her.

The Countess uncovered her eyes, and sighing deeply, replied—"That it was a black recital, and ought to be buried in eternal oblivion; but necessity sometimes altered the nature of circumstances, and self-exculpation had claims which, in particular situations, required some sacrifices at the altar of pride and mortification; nay, even demanded them as a piece of justice due to one's own character. In this light," added the Countess, "I view the present disagreeable task, and shall therefore endeavour to suppress those sentiments of indignant sorrow which at times swell my heart

to agony, while the remaining incidents of my unhappy life are laid before you.

“ When my senses once more unfortunately returned, M. de St. Clare was no longer near me; Mavillon too had disappeared; and from that fatal moment not a single trace of those respectable friends has come to my knowledge. I turned my eyes on the scene with astonishment; a total change in my situation had taken place; my horror increased by the survey; I found myself in a frightful dungeon, amidst the dying and the dead, surrounded with beings whose dæmoniac forms and countenances seemed suitable to the infernal regions in which I was now immured. The alteration surprised me the more I perceived it; but my intellects were at first too disordered, and my head too much confused, to account for it in any satisfactory manner. The whole transaction had been so instantaneous, so unexpected, and so dreadful, that it only floated on my memory like the faint images of some frightful dream, the particular circumstances of which vanish from remembrance with the early dawn of the morning, leaving behind them nothing more than a general impression of something horrible on the mind.

“ The present objects, however, which met my view, were calculated to inspire a sad conviction
of

of the painful reality: my heart sunk within me, and involuntarily recoiled from the stern and menacing gaze to which I was frequently exposed from those who now appeared masters of my destiny, and who apparently took a diabolical pleasure in the terror they saw depicted on my features, as their eyes, strongly expressive of every vile and malignant passion, fiercely glared on the helpless and trembling victim before them.

“ I looked round for support and consolation, but no consolation or support was at hand for me! My terror increasing, from the situation of the spot in which I was placed, happening to be near the entrance of the dungeon, which particularly subjected me to the taunting insults of the inhuman wretches who were perpetually passing backwards and forwards, I arose with the intention to retire to a more distant corner. My feeble limbs would scarcely second the wish; I reached a gloomy, grated window with difficulty, and leaning my head against a projection on the rugged wall, endeavoured to retrace, in thought the momentary occurrence which had thus suddenly reduced me to such a state:—but my ideas still remained confused, and the faculties of my mind unequal to the task of discrimination; a heavy stupor seemed to benumb

every sense, and rendered me for some time nearly indifferent to the horrors which environed me.

“ Two days slowly elapsed in this gloomy and forlorn state; how much longer it might have lasted, I know not. On the evening of the second, an accident (which in different circumstances would have proved alarming, but at present passed unheeded) restored my torpid recollection to some degree of sensibility.

“ The projection on the wall, already mentioned, continued to be my customary pillow; there my extended arms usually supported the aching head that heavily reclined upon them. In a temporary change of posture, I happened to strike one of my temples against an iron hook, fixed near my resting-place, and a torrent of blood burst from the wound, which would probably have terminated all my miseries, had not a person who observed it, from a mistaken notion of humanity, come to my assistance, and stopped the effusion. Though restored recollection brought a thousand additional pangs in its train, my heart was considerably relieved by the accidental and copious discharge; and I became gradually able to observe what was passing near me. This faculty, however, was not long of an enviable duration. On the following afternoon my apprehensions were
roused

roused by the timid looks and whispered alarms of those with whom I was destined to be a fellow-sufferer. I remarked with new-born terror the shrinking form, the recoiling step, and the ghastly look of despair that prevailed on every side when the rusty gates turning on their creaking hinges, spread expectation, in all its revolutionary horrors, through the damp and dreary vaults of the prison—vaults where silence, like the stillness of the grave, was only interrupted by heart-rending sighs, or the hollow, oppressive groan that floated along their arched roofs in melancholy murmurs.

“ I was, it is true, confined in the Prison de la Force, and the point of the poniard, or the critical touch of the ready prepared musket, apparently my only probable liberator from the evils which encompassed me. Yet though strongly prepossessed with this awful notion, and considering myself as nearly freed from the toils and turmoils of this world, “ the thousand ills that flesh is heir to,” I could not, nevertheless, suppress a sensation of curiosity on the cause of the perturbation visibly increasing around me, and by degrees became acquainted with its fearful origin.

“ Momentarily satiated with the atrocities committed in the walls of the Abbaye, and several other prisons, their bloody perpetrators paused to

take breath, and superficial observers fondly, but weakly, flattered themselves with indications of returning order from the circumstance of so unexpected an *interregnum*; but the delusive calm was like the fullen intervals of an overwhelming tempest, that merely stops for a renewal of its strength, and returns again with additional fury. The public mind, rather fatigued than permanently satisfied with deeds of death and devastation, speedily recurred to the predominant bias of the times, that is to say, to the commission of every enormity, under the ostensible appellation of liberty and equality; and the moral instruments of the new-fashioned system were rumoured to be once more rearing the yet reeking standard of bloody reformation! This report was but too well founded, and the unfortunate prisoners had every thing to apprehend from its consequences.

“ A few hours elapsed under all the horrors of the pictured scene, which imagination continually presented to our view as the last of our wretched existence. At length the miseries of protracted suspense gave place to the most frightful certainty; a confused murmur was repeatedly wafted through the grated windows of the building, by the passing blast that swept at intervals along our dungeons. Expectation was again on the rack; the hapless prisoners

prisoners crowded together, and, with their eyes fixed immoveably on the iron door, seemed to be all ear; not a breath was scarcely heard; they watched for the future in silence and horror, and involuntarily shrunk back at the smallest noise from without. The sound that excited their attention gradually approached; it became more distinct, and at last "*Ca-ira!*" that war-song of worse than Indian savages, thrilled every breast with anguish, as its notes were distinguished amidst the loud, frequent, and menacing shouts of the barbarous multitude, who now filled the street. That fatal strain was, we knew, the rallying sound of death, and we looked for nothing short of immediate destruction! I still, however, remained in my solitary situation in the window, for my trembling limbs refused their office; and, indeed, whither could they have borne me free from danger? In my present abode every corner was equally liable to intrusion, and possessed no power of defence to shield me from the stroke of indiscriminate fury.

"The extinction of my mortal existence would once, at a certain period, have been an object of no terror to my mind, and I hope it was not even then improperly so; but yet I nevertheless felt a repugnance to the idea, which, after all I had recently

recently suffered, could only be accounted for by the number of years latterly passed in the calm, uninterrupted enjoyment of life, free alike from the anxieties of hope, or the pain of disappointment; for how could either affect her who had already drained the cup of misfortune to the very bottom? But, perhaps, it is natural for us, even though once having experienced nearly all the evils incident to mortality, to be sensible of this sensation at a period when we expected to prove materially serviceable to those in whose happiness we were most interested; and had besides no new or particular cause for dissatisfaction with the world on our own account. So it was, however, that a sudden crash, like the bursting open of our prison doors, no sooner stunned every ear, and struck upon every palpitating heart, than I became again totally unconscious of all that followed, and heedless of the approaching storm.

“ On opening my eyes some time afterwards, and gazing round with a vague expression of terror, I found myself supported in the arms of some unknown person. His countenance did not please me, and weak and trembling as I was, I disengaged myself from his hold. He renewed not his assiduity; a confused sound of voices, mingled with murmurs and fearful groans, proceeded from every quarter;

quarter; and though shrinking from the survey, I yet instinctively turned my eyes in pursuit of the cause. The same man who had rendered me assistance, again met my view; he stood in a musing posture, intently gazing on my face, with a look which appalled me, though I then knew not why. As I recoiled from his observation, another person hastily entered the cell, and asked in a low voice for some papers. The first appeared confused and absent; he heard him not immediately, but starting from his reverie on a second application, instantly, in a hurried manner, searched his coat pockets, pulled out a large parcel, and looking over them as they retired together, quitted the place in evident agitation. One or two of the papers, unperceived, dropped upon the floor; I heeded them not, however. My sentence, I concluded, was passed, and their contents were consequently a matter of indifference to a mind hovering on the supposed verge of eternity. A black ribbon, which seemed once to have been fixed to something, lay at my feet; it was broken about the knot, and recently stained with blood. I shook it with horror from the edge of my gown, on which it had fallen; a harder substance, as I heard by the sound, was thrown to a little distance, in consequence of the motion; it was bright, and from

from its appearance seemed to be of value;—propelled to examine it by the secret influence of some powerful attraction, for which I could not account, I stooped, took it up, and found a small golden case in my hand.

“ But, Oh Heavens! conceive, if you can, the sensation that swelled my throbbing bosom, on perceiving it to be the very same my husband usually wore about his neck, and which had been lost during the conflict with his assassins in the Forest of Narbonne!

“ The contents of this case were remarkable. St. Hypolite’s hair and my own forming a beautiful emblematical device of Love and Constancy first met the view, and, to a superficial observer, appeared to be all it contained; but no sooner was a secret spring on one side of it touched, than our miniature figures, standing with united hands at the temple of Hymen, which was elegantly decorated with appropriate ornaments, descriptive of mutual affection and lasting concord, were discovered. Each of them bore a striking resemblance to their original. They were small indeed, but executed in a most admirable style. The one intended for me had been copied from a very capital painting, which I presented to St. Hypolite before the event of our unfortunate marriage took place; that

that of which I have been speaking, he received from Paris on the very evening preceding it; and I hung it myself round his neck on the following day at the altar. Judge then, if you can, of my sensations on first recovering it again, under such circumstances.

“ Scarcely knowing what I did, scarcely able to credit the evidence of my own senses, I rivetted my aching eyes on the well-recollected token, and deeply sighing, turned it round with a trembling hand in search of the secret spring already mentioned, almost wishing, at the same time, that my eager endeavours might prove unsuccessful.

“ That, however, was not pre-ordained to be the case; certain conviction soon flashed on the bitter truth; and nearly petrified with an incident so unaccountable, a discovery which recalled so many interesting, so many dreadful images afresh to remembrance, I still held the fatal painting in my hand, when the same person, whose countenance had lately disgusted me, in spite of his offered assistance, again entered the dungeon.

‘ Where,’ cried I, in a low, tremulous, and almost inarticulate voice, while my features were convulsed with agitation, and my eyes almost starting from their sockets, ‘ where, Oh where is the owner of this painting? Tell me, I beseech you,

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as you hope for peace and happiness in this world, or the next, say to whom does this picture belong?’

“ The wildness of my looks and manner, with the visible emotion that shook my whole frame, as, with an air of perturbation and distraction, I repeated these questions, evidently surprised him. Conscience, that powerful but secret monitor, seemed apparently to be erecting its awful tribunal in his bosom. Thunderstruck and silent, he attempted not to speak for several moments; but rudely snatching the case from my hand, alternately gazed upon my face, and the picture it contained.

“ The horrid expression of his countenance grew darker, more terrific; it appalled me; it was diabolical in the extreme. I became silent in my turn, and for some time feared to re-urge the sad enquiry; but desperation at length goaded me on. I was not, however, permitted to proceed.

‘ Answer me first!’ exclaimed he, suddenly starting from his reverie, and roughly seizing my arm; ‘ tell me, are you (as, allowing for the difference of years, this picture seems to indicate), ‘are you the Countess de Narbonne?—the woman once an object of mutual pursuit to the Baron de Verney and M. de St. Hypo——’

“ His faltering tongue refused to proceed.

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The fatal, the detested name of "Marat !" burst, intuitively, accompanied by a deep groan, from my lips, and I fell senseless at his feet ! !

" How long I remained in this state of enviable ease, after the dreadful discovery of my husband's probable assassin, I know not. When Recollection resumed her empire, I found myself alone in a smaller cell than that I formerly occupied, and the door secured upon me as usual. Hours passed away uninterrupted by the intrusive step of any human being. The miserable condition in which I had been left, apparently attracted no attention; the long-lost voice of consolation, and the yet well-remembered one of oppression seemed equally ceased for me. I imagined myself at length finally deserted by friend and foe; the hand into which I had fallen, was not likely to let me tell tales; and I doubted not but I was immured for life, and doomed to perish, unheeded, within the dreary walls of my frightful dungeon. The sound of passing footsteps was, indeed, frequently distinguished in the vicinity, and loud and discordant voices sometimes reached the close and high-grated window of the cell; but the former approached not, nor the latter ascended for me. Nothing, not even a death of hunger itself, seemed, however, half so terrifically repugnant to my feelings

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as the presence of my infernal jailer; every other evil appeared trifling in comparison to the tumults excited in my breast by the sight of Marat; and I gradually became unsolicitous for the entrance of others, and undismayed by the prospect of the fate that consequently awaited me, in consideration of being saved from the unmanly insults of a wretch, whose name alone was at any time capable of agonizing my very soul.

“ A crust of coarse brown bread, with a small quantity of half-putrid water in a broken jug, probably left by some of my unfortunate predecessors, on exchanging the cell for the scaffold, were found on a rough stone shelf in a corner of the dungeon, and for two days, sparingly used, had been my only sustenance. These were now, however, much reduced; but indifferent as life was become to me, which I only viewed in the light of procrastinated misery, death, I began to think, approached in no form more terrific than that of famine; and therefore, weak and debilitated as I certainly was, I prepared my mind to meet the sole deliverer from whom any thing could be hoped, with a proper degree of fortitude and resignation. I had long, in some senses of the word, been dead to the joys of the world; I was now hastening to the goal that was finally to emancipate me

me from its sorrows. Under such circumstances what had I either to fear or regret?—Nothing. I bowed my head in gratitude to Heaven, for preserving me free from intentional evil, or the actual commission of any guilty deed; and meekly waited for the period which was to deliver my soul to him who gave it.

CHAP. XVIII.

“ I know the laws permit thee—the gross laws
“ That rule the vulgar.”

THOMSON.

“ Tangled in the fold
“ Of dire necessity.”

MILTON.

“ **O**N the evening of the following day, approaching footsteps were once more heard, slowly winding along the vaulted passage that led to my dungeon; the door of which was soon after unlocked, and as it suddenly turned upon its rusty hinges, I fixed a languid and heavy eye, with trembling solicitude, on its jarring movement, while my exhausted frame, worn out and faint with watching, sorrow, and famine, was every instant ready to drop from the old, crazy, worm-eaten bedstead, on the
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the edge of which I had seated myself in momentary expectation of dissolution.

“ A form, at first dimly seen through the low, dark porch that covered the door, now stood before me; one single glance sufficed to shew who it was. I screamed with horror, wildly exclaiming to be ‘ saved from the murderer of my husband!’ and raising myself with difficulty, staggered to a stone bench, the only convenience of the kind in the cell, on which I dropped, more dead than alive. My voice, my helpless situation, were equally unheeded; no friendly arm appeared to shield me from the presence of the bloody Marat! The sanguinary wretch advanced nearer; he was pale with rage; and revenge, though I knew not for what, sat scowling on his contracted brows and dark, lowering countenance. Shuddering, I turned from the appalling gaze of his threatening, but unsteady eye with disgust, and covering my face with one hand, as I waved the other for him to keep his distance, continued instinctively to utter exclamations expressive of horror and contempt—the irritating, but only sensations by which I was then actuated.

“ Apparently irresolute, he attempted not for a few moments to interrupt the effusions of despair,
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and stood motionless before me, immersed in some dire contemplation.

“ But this interval of forbearance was of short duration; the natural bias of his mind returned; when, suddenly rousing himself, he caught hold of my still extended arm, tossed it from him with characteristic brutality, commanded silence in a menacing tone, and presenting a paper, fiercely ordered me to peruse its contents, and determine accordingly. I motioned a refusal in silence; he rudely removed the hand that covered my convulsed features, and again tendered the note for acceptance. I shrunk, intuitively, from the offer; but a look then encountered, quieted complaint; with trembling reluctance it was received, but my agitated fingers refused their office, and it dropped upon the ground.

‘ Lift it,’ cried he, bluntly; ‘ the times admit not of ceremony. I no longer acknowledge the fastidious distinctions of rank—those airy bubbles, hitherto so tenaciously cherished by their former corrupt, but now crest-fallen possessors!—Lift it, I say!’ repeated the monster, with an accent of increasing insolence; ‘ peruse its contents, I tell you!—no alternative remains!—prompt obedience is required to the proposition it contains, otherwise worse awaits you! Be expeditious then!—

I have

I have no leisure to bestow on ill-timed procrastination.'

" Though now inexpressibly faint, and scarcely able to bear the violent palpitation of my half-broken heart, I stooped, and took up the vile paper.

' Read it!' said the mean oppressor, for I held it unexamined in my hand. ' That is the next task you have to perform!' added he, with a sneer, and another look, which enforced immediate compliance.

" Conceiving it to be a preparatory order for the guillotine, and knowing such a mandate was an unnecessary form to those who, like me, had no means of defence against superior force and lawless aggression, I threw my eyes over it with indifference; I soon perceived my mistake, however. It was a decree of the Committee of Safety, and of so strange a nature, that had not my own experience ascertained its existence, the fatal truth must otherwise have appeared incredible; but it was the production of a set of men whose savage refinements, and brutal ingenuity, have long become a conspicuous part of the most unparalleled and degrading character.

" The avowed object of this infamous measure, was to secure a permanent basis for the equalizing system to rest upon; and to sustain the sinking popularity

popularity of the nation, which was partially stigmatized, about this period, with a supposed inclination to aristocratical tendencies.

“ The secret, but most powerful motive, however, was the further humiliation of the higher classes of the Nobility, from whom, with the sensation of vulgar, overbearing insolence, it was determined to wrest every vestige of remaining superiority, by compelling women of rank, birth, and riches, to engage in marriage with persons of the lowest origin, whose manners, principles, and conduct were equally as disgraceful to themselves, as repugnant to every sentiment of sound virtue, moral rectitude, or the consolatory precepts of a religion which they had endeavoured to subvert with more than atheistical impiety.

“ By this daring outrage on public decency and domestic enjoyment, it was purposed to annihilate the existence of all those finer ligaments that bind the different orders of mankind to the kindred society of congenial minds, and to efface, in time, what was styled the prejudices attached to pre-eminent stations, together with the habits of early life; all of which, it was said, only served to keep up invidious distinctions, and consequently engendered the very evils so loudly complained of. You possibly recollect the circumstance to which I allude:

I allude: it made some noise, amidst other enormities, at the period of its promulgation, and was to the following effect:——

“ That it had been resolved, in the Committee of Safety, that every single woman, whether maid or widow, and every married one, whose husband happened to be absent, and not employed in the service of the Republic, should appear with a husband, at an office appointed for that purpose, in the space of three months; and that a failure in complying with this ordinance, was to be punished with the guillotine, or by such other means as the different decrees of contumely might merit.”——

“ To add to the extraordinary circumstances of this degrading arrangement, each woman was to be compelled to receive the first offer of marriage that was made to her by any man whatever, be his character, situation, principles, or employment what it might, even if he should be the murderer of a father, a child, nay, of a husband himself, to whose nuptial rights he offered to succeed, &c. &c. &c.*

“ To comment on the deep atrocity of this abominable decree, is, I am persuaded, unnecessary.

* This decree really existed.

It speaks for itself, and fills the mind with sufficient indignation. I threw the paper that contained it on the ground, without attempting to put the feelings of the moment into language; and waiting in fearful suspense for what was to follow, reclined my throbbing temples, and burning forehead, on a trembling arm, scarcely able to sustain them, and remained silent.

‘ You have read, I presume,’ said the marble-hearted ruffian, lifting it coolly from the floor, ‘ what our legislature, in its wisdom, has decreed for the well-being of the subjects it deigns to take under its protection; and hence must be convinced that, by prompt obedience, you can only be entitled to benefit by its parental consideration. —Nay, start not, fair lady! no disdainful looks, no more quality airs, I beseech you; listen to me patiently, and then make your election!—Unexpected discoveries have occurred, and explanations accidentally taken place between us, against the consequences of which it particularly behoves me to be upon my guard. You understand me, no doubt.—I now bear a distinguished station amongst my colleagues in the commonwealth; but the footing on which I stand, is by no means so secure, as not to run the risk of being injured by the
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chance of a false step. Merit ever has its enemies; and mine, I know, keep a watchful eye over all my actions;—what, in the present crisis, might only be esteemed a necessary measure when performed by themselves, and either attended with applause, or at worst overlooked with indifference, would, in my case, though perpetrated so many years ago, prove decidedly ruinous, and the grave of all my future prospects, were a single item of the affair to transpire.

“ That picture—you have now a pretty just idea, I perceive, to whom it formerly belonged, and how it came into my possession—that picture has stood your best friend! But for it, I had taken certain measures to silence enquiry, and prevent any detrimental consequences accruing to myself from the recent discovery. Ever since I first gazed upon it, love, or something like it, has taken possession of my soul, and powerfully pleads for the original. I little suspected, indeed, that my share in some past transactions was so well known to you, at the period I happened to be struck with the strong resemblance you bore to my miniature. It was a secret I did not wish divulged, but it signifies little; you are equally mine at any rate; and may think yourself fortunate, that in falling to

my lot, the impression you have made on my mind secures you from the stroke of the guillotine, or possibly a more private exit. Unless I had resolved upon espousing you, it is clear you must have been removed some way or other: such a sacrifice was necessary for ensuring my own safety, and on that subject the world does my prudence justice. But, independent of individual suggestions, the laws of the nation demand unconditional compliance, and therefore other reasons are superfluous: I have chosen you in preference to others who aspired to that distinction, and mine you must consequently be!

‘Your’s!!!’ cried I, with a force I had just before supposed myself unequal to, while my heart seemed to swell to my throat, and my eyes flashed with the strongest sensation of indignant contempt, ‘espouse you! the murderer of my husband! the sanguinary, unfeeling, unprincipled Marat!—No!—never, never!—What terrors has the guillotine, or any other mode of execution, in comparison with the bare idea of a proposal so detestable?’

‘Softly, softly, my *ci devant* Countess!’ returned the hardened villain, with the most insulting air of cool perseverance; ‘not quite so fast, good Madam,

Madam, if you please!—Less tragedy rant, and more common sense, I beseech you! I am not so superficially acquainted with the study of human nature, as not to know that ladies of your disposition affect a mighty indifference for existence on similar occasions. Nay, I have even seen some of them go beyond pretence, and make practice coincide with theory: but I flatter myself you are a woman of better understanding, and will listen to the dictates of reason, as promulgated by the Committee of Safety; particularly when I take the trouble of assuring you that the intermediate difference of years has not cooled that passion for the original, which your inanimate representative formerly inspired.’——

“ But why, my dear Charlotte,” continued the Countess, deeply sighing, “ why should I longer dwell on this cruel scene? Suffice it to say that, finding me equally deaf to arguments, entreaties, or threats, I was finally given to understand that, instead of the dignity thus rejected, I should first be reduced by him to the most humiliating condition a virtuous woman can be placed in, and afterwards consigned to any other brute in the human shape, who chose to take me on the same degrading terms! Sealing this dreadful sentence

with the most horrid oaths, he left me to ruminate upon the shocking alternative.

“ I had used exertions infinitely beyond my strength, in the course of this trying interview; and the moment I was once more left to myself, the effects were such as might naturally be supposed. I became low, languid, exhausted, and even for several moments nearly insensible to my situation; the predominant terror, however, soon resumed its place in my breast, and with it returned a conviction of the necessity which enjoined me to use every means for the support of my corporeal strength, my sinking spirits, and my almost conquered senses; lest they should fail in some future hour of trial, when their assiduous suggestions might prove serviceable in averting the threatened evil that seemed to await me.

“ Prepossessed with this notion, I instinctively swallowed a little wine, and a small piece of bread, with which I had now been supplied by the person appointed for that purpose. The relief this afforded was inconceivable; I felt myself wonderfully refreshed, and my reasoning faculties once more almost restored to their former tone. In proportion as this became the case, recollection started at the prospect of surrounding ills; and the dread of an union so horrible could scarcely be exceeded

exceeded by those apprehensions resulting from a contemplation of the frightful alternative already mentioned. I knew, fatally knew, that my wretched oppressor was fully competent, to the commission of all he had threatened; or, indeed, any thing else within the reach of his abilities, were it ever so wicked, provided it interfered not with his own personal safety. And to such a pitch of frenzy was my mind gradually wrought by the impression his words had left upon it, that nothing seemed too difficult to undertake for accomplishing my emancipation from the yawning and terrific abyss now preparing to engulf me.

“Religion, it is true, prohibited the infliction of a voluntary death by my own hand; but I was more than once forced to call in its benign assistance, to restrain the suggestions of despair. Indeed, had I even been so disposed, no immediate means remained in my power for that purpose; as precautions had been taken to render such an attempt abortive, on the first discovery of my person by Marat: and the slow, lingering procrastination of famine, had I determined on the experiment, would perhaps have been too dilatory in its progress to save me from the very evils for which I courted its aid.”——

During the whole detail of Marat's inhuman

treatment of the Countess, Mademoiselle de Cordet appeared unusually agitated; she half rose several times from her chair, seated herself again, and again changed her posture; while the strongest traits of indignation, and even some indications of revenge flashed from her animated eyes, and unconsciously burst in broken sentences from lips of coral, and teeth of ivory. In the meantime Madame de Narbonne continued her narrative in the following manner:—

“ I am unable to ascertain the length of the period in which so many terrific images presented themselves to view, and harrowed up my soul with every pang that suspense and apprehension, under such circumstances, could possibly inflict. The struggling tempest in my mind began to be too much to suppress; and reason was once more upon the verge of yielding to the horrors which environed me, when my prison-door again opened, and I attempted to rush forward, in order to pass those who now entered, without exactly knowing my own intentions, if successful in the design. For that trial, however, I was not at this juncture reserved; too weak to accomplish the momentary impulse by which I was actuated, I dropped down on the threshold, and another fainting fit procured me a short respite from the torture of reflection, and

and the accumulating torments of my approaching fate.

“ My heavy eyelids, at length languidly opening, fixed on a face utterly unknown to me; I gazed upon its features with the vacant stare of departed memory, till roused by the sound of the Marseillois Hymn, that was loudly vociferated by some unfeeling wretch in the vicinity. I now became more collected; and imagining I perceived evident traces of compassionate benignity in the looks of the stranger who supported me, I eagerly caught hold of his arm, beseeching him, on my knees, to save me from destruction, in the baneful form of Marat!

“ The person to whom I addressed this prayer, was accompanied by a young man, whose eyes, though less expressive of benevolence, were nevertheless immoveably rivetted on my features, in a manner too officiously intrusive to prepossess me in his favour; and he appeared less anxious to afford me manual assistance, than intent upon some secret gratification, derived to himself through the medium of his observations. Nevertheless, the twice repeated request of the other was at length attended to, and he aided his companion in raising me from the floor. I was seated near the spot where I had fallen; but it was still with difficulty I kept

kept myself from another fainting fit; the elder of the two wet my parched lips with a few drops of the wine I had formerly partaken of; and as my aching, languid head leant against the side of the iron door, and with half-opened eyes occasionally rested upon their figures, I saw them stationary before me, with looks expressive of feelings no doubt softened by the forlorn, defenceless, and apparently expiring situation of the miserable being they stood silently contemplating.

“ During this solemn pause my heart and brain seemed equally on fire. I sighed deeply, and pressing a trembling hand on my burning forehead, seemed once more sinking to the ground, when he, who had first assisted me, again performed the same friendly office, and rushing forward, prevented my fall.

‘ We know who you are,’ said this benevolent stranger, as he gently supported me, and perceived I was become more capable of listening to him. ‘ We have overheard your discourse with Marat, and from the nature of it, commiserate your sufferings; but this is all the length we can go to serve you. The national decree, which you have seen, renders emancipation from these walls as impossible, as it is to avert the fate prepared for you by the person who presented it. Past this door

door it is morally beyond our power to conduct you, unless the letter of the law is immediately complied with, and you depart in the character of a wife; but that alternative, it seems, you refuse to comply with, even should it be found practicable to change the object of your terror, and substitute another in his place. Marat can adduce no proof of his offer being the first matrimonial one received in this way; or even if he should be able to accomplish such a thing, you may be placed, in the meanwhile, under other protection, where his avenging arm cannot extend to reach you.—Say then, do you agree to this proposal? Will you submit yourself to my directions, and follow them?”

‘Oh yes, yes!’ cried I, in the wild delirium of increasing apprehension, and almost gasping for breath, ‘I will agree to any thing—to all things! provided I am only secured from the unhallowed presence of my husband’s murderer, and the worse than deadly lot he reserves for me!’

‘Accept then this young man for your spouse!’ replied he; ‘we are interested in your fate; and, I repeat it, no other method remains to elude the pursuit of him who now persecutes and terrifies you, save the one thus offered to your acceptance.’

“He paused for a moment, and remarked the varying colour of my cheeks with an air of pity and
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and suppressed regret, that bespoke him possessed of more sensibility than the generality of the wretches with whom I had lately been condemned to associate.

‘An oath,’ he resumed, ‘is required at the door of every individual dungeon, as a proof of the prisoner’s unequivocal compliance with the ordinance published by the Committee of Safety. This oath is to be taken down by any single witness on paper, and produced on the following day, to ascertain the completion of the marriage ceremony, which must be previously performed in the interim. Without a similar certificate you cannot, as I have already told you, pass these gates.’

“The length of this explanation gave me time to reflect on the nature of the proposition to which I had so hastily agreed; and my heart revolting at the terms of it, I determined rather to dare the worst, by retracting the recent consent, than purchase freedom at so dear a rate, almost endeavouring to persuade myself that Marat’s protracted absence might be occasioned by some incident favourable to my wishes; or, at least indulging the fallacious supposition that he would scarcely venture so far in licentious enormity as his threats seemed to indicate. Under this impression I slowly rose, and retiring to my usual seat in the interior
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of the cell, said, in a mournful voice, as I left them—‘ Well then, since human means cannot befriend me, I must wait with patience for the interposition of that Providence, to whose care I now commit myself, and who will not finally suffer the innocent to be always oppressed by the guilty.’

“ The man seemed surprised at the inconsistency of my proceeding.

‘ What, Madame, do you hesitate ?’ exclaimed he, recoiling a few steps, and regarding me with an air of astonishment ; ‘ is there any great sacrifice requisite for becoming the nominal wife, as I may call it, of an honest man, who wishes to render you an essential service, and even risks his own safety to secure your’s from the power of those who possess both the inclination and ability to perpetrate deeds, at which human nature shudders ?’

‘ Yes,’ said his companion, interrupting him, and addressing me almost for the first time, ‘ yes, I seek but the promotion of your welfare ! Motives of compassion have led us to make this offer, in consequence of your late altercation with Marat, which, as my friend has already told you, we accidentally overheard. The impracticability of offering effectual assistance, under any other form,

form, has also been explained. If our proposal is accepted, I give you my solemn word of honour, that the ties which unite us, shall only prove binding while you permit them to remain so; nor shall they be considered as entitling me to any controul whatever over your actions. But your own judgment and pleasure must direct you; the alternative is fully known; time presses, and though we have reason to believe Marat otherwise employed at present, there is nevertheless no security against his speedy return. Your determination must not, therefore, be longer retarded, if you wish to escape from impending danger; procrastination may occasion a surprise, from the fatal consequences of which, it will probably be impossible to extricate either you or ourselves.—Hark!’ continued he, suddenly starting, and looking round with an air of apprehensive enquiry; ‘I fear the crisis of our fate is already at hand, and my prophetic words on the point of being verified!—Heavens! yes, that is surely the voice of Marat!’

“The elder person stole softly to the door, and listened; for they had previously followed me when I quitted my station at the entrance of the dungeon.

‘You have not a moment to lose,’ said he, in a whispering voice, as he cautiously joined us again;

again; 'I have just heard of some indistinct sentences, partially overheard it is true, but evidently applicable to your situation, and allusive to prior orders, which nothing but the heart of Marat could dictate. Trust me, Madame, we deceive you not; the worst, the most degrading of all possible treatment is prepared for you, if the hand of Marat continues to be rejected;—he jests not with the execution of evil; and the contemplation of excruciating misery in others, is to him a principal subject of infernal enjoyment. Your safety now entirely depends on announcing yourself a married woman, and acknowledging the man received in this light, as the husband to whose protection you henceforth commit your person. He who at present offers to undertake that office, is of plebeian extraction, it is true, but his connections are respectable; some of them even possess a powerful influence in the public assemblies of the nation, and Marat himself dares not molest you, if your choice falls in the direction we wish it. The period of our remaining here is nearly expired; and the order for admittance, which was procured to liberate a person in the adjoining cell, whom the National Assembly wished to examine, will not obtain a second visit to these dreary abodes of misery. Hope then rests on the present instant;

Marat

Marat certainly returns in an hour's time, and all is of course over!!'——

“ A solemn but short pause succeeded the last words of the speaker. It was interrupted by the distant reverberation of fire-arms, and the heart-appalling vociferations of a tumultuous multitude. *Vive Marat!*’ amidst the groans of the dying, and the exulting shouts of their assassins, reached my ears, and once more convulsed every limb with terror. Imagination represented me subjected to the brutal passions of the now fast approaching monster, and afterwards consigned to the indiscriminate outrages of the inhuman barbarians, who were thus weaving a claim to favour in the innocent blood of their fellow-creatures, and extending the limits of every vice beyond credibility. I raised my head, and, starting from the contemplation of a scene so appalling, in a tremulous voice, requested a second renewal of the solemn promise already given, purporting that I should no longer be considered as this man’s wife, than was necessary for the purpose of emancipation, or agreeable to my own inclination; in return for which concession, I engaged to heap riches on my liberators, and evince my future gratitude in every possible manner.

“ The shouts of the multitude became more
distinct,

distinct, and the hated name of my intended oppressor re-echoed from every quarter;—my brain seemed again on fire; the tumultuous throbbing of my heart and temples grew intolerable. A loud and fearful yell in the interior of the prison caused me to spring forward, and seize one of my companions by the arm. The ceremony was hastily repeated; and a certificate of its performance drawn out;—I fell, however, into violent convulsions before the conclusion of the former, and in this situation was conveyed from my late gloomy abode to other lodgings.

END OF VOL. III.



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